

CONTEMPORARY
CHINESE
SHORT STORIES

EDITED AND TRANSLATED

BY

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AND

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NOEL CARRINGTON
TRANSATLANTIC ARTS CO LTD
29 PERCY STREET LONDON
AND AT NEW YORK

1946

PRINTED IN ENGLAND AT THE CURWEN PRESS

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INTRODUCTION

THE 4 May Movement of 1919 was a political movement designed to force the hand of the Government against accepting the demands of the Japanese, but in its effect on the life of the Chinese it was considerably more than this. It was a day of awakening, a sudden shaking off of the inertia which had settled on China since the early failures of the Revolution. Already, in 1917, the beginnings of the new outlook could be seen. Hu Shih's proposals for literary reform were the symptoms of the change sweeping over the country; and when he demanded that the ancient language of poetry and scholarship should give place to the language spoken by the people, he was deliberately attempting to cut the past off from the present. The past was like a tumour. It was necessary that it should be cut off completely. And in order to regain the damaged health, the patient must seek new modes of living, new customs, new ideas, must speak and write in a new language. There was a new language already at hand. It had even been employed by a great novelist, the author of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, but this language had been constantly derided by scholars. Chinese history was so closely interwoven with the structure of its ancient grammar, it was so much a part of the heritage of the *literati*, that there were thousands of scholars who maintained a vested interest in its survival. The traditions of generations are hard to break down, and they possess a peculiar resilience. Hu Shih finally succeeded in his main purpose, and men came to realize that the old language no longer represented the traditions of the present. It was the kind of change which occurred in Italy at the time of Dante, but the struggle was more bitter. It lasted for five years, and though the victory has been won, there are still survivors among those who cherish the ancient ways.

Hu Shih's enemies were legion. Among the most resourceful was the extraordinary old scholar Lin Ch'in-nan who, without knowing a single foreign tongue, translated into impeccable *wen-h* the novels of Dickens and Balzac. He was among the first to open out the unknown literatures of the West for the Chinese, and it is a singular fate which makes them almost unreadable today, because so few students are accustomed to read in that parched and rather bitter language, so simple and so mysteriously complex. Shen Ts'ung-wen has publicly admitted his debt to the early translations of Dickens and though there were once a host of minor writers who fell under the spell of Lin Ch'in-nan's translations, the translations themselves are almost forgotten.

Hu Shih was not alone in proclaiming the ascendancy of the common tongue. The battle which waged around Peking University was fought with the help of the venerable President of the University, Dr. Ts'ai Yuan-peï, who was to become the butt of all the defenders of the ancient tongue. Those who desired to change the form of the language were called 'whore-mongers' or worse, they had sold themselves to the West, they were undeserving of the Chinese traditions. Neither side gave any quarter. It was a battle as damaging as many fought with guns. And historically it was more important than many battles, for the whole course of Chinese civilization was changed.

The beginnings were not propitious. Hu Shih's poems, in *pai-hua* were at best experimental. The first work of any importance to appear were the short stories by Lu Hsun, published in 1918. Among these were *A Madman's Diary*, and *Tomorrow*. These, too, were derivative. The first, as Lu Hsun disclosed later, was derived from a short story by Gogol and from a fragment from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: 'You have climbed a long way from insects

and worms to reach manhood, but there are still worms and insects among you. You were once monkeys, and even now you are more monkeyish than any particular monkey.' And speaking of his early stories, Lu Hsun said 'In *A Madman's Diary* I intended to reveal the disastrous consequences of the Chinese family system and traditional moral concepts. The hero seems to me to show a deeper melancholy than Gogol's hero, and to be less abstract than Nietzsche's Superman. I have since endeavoured to free myself from foreign influences, and in my later works I believe that there is some ripening of the technique and a deeper and more certain delineation of character. However, my later works may lack the former passion and strength.'

What Lu Hsun says of himself is applicable to nearly all the Chinese writers of his time, and particularly to those who were steeped in Western literature. Lu Hsun's whole life was a cry against the fundamental oppression of a social system which had long ago exhausted its usefulness. In *The Waves of the Wind* the problem is examined, but treated with a simplicity which almost defies analysis. Lu Hsun was a satirist, but like Swift he found that it was necessary to go further. He writes with a detachment, yet he loved men too much, and he had too deep a respect even for Ah Q. Unlike Shen Ts'ung-wen he wrote with extreme difficulty. The walls of his room in Peking were covered with little slips of paper, on which he had written stray sentences, he would ponder these fragmentary and disjointed indications of a completed story, moving the little slips of paper about until at last the finished story fell into his mind. He had the look of a peasant and the manners of a prince, a dark swarthy man who feared no one and found life good, in spite of its astingent taste.

Lu Hsun remains the father of modern Chinese literature, his shadow looms heavily on his followers. The brutality

and compensating delicacy of much modern Chinese writing springs directly from his work, and the influences to which he succumbed are still the influences which pervade the younger writers. In Ping Hsin we see the same despairing compassion 'The shaping of the earth, the motion of the stars, the fall of frost and dew, the blossoming of plants, all these are dedicated to love alone', she writes in *The Awakening*, but she has no illusions about the delicacy of the love she celebrates. Life is hard and cruel, and more particularly cruel in China than elsewhere. There remains, as there remained for Lu Hsun, the ancient ancestral belief in the ultimate goodness of nature. As Lo Hua-shen says in his famous story *The Diligent Spider* through the mouth of his heroine. 'It is my fate to live in my web. I swallow the insects, some harmless, some poisonous, and then I spin my web. The first delicate threads may be dispersed by the wind, but eventually it will take shape. Even when the old web is destroyed, I can hide and wait for another chance to spin.' But in the early twenties there was no time to wait, the period of the civil wars was reaching towards a climax and a more vigorous and more sensuous literature was to take the place of the works of the forerunners.

Lu Hsun has related how, as a medical student in Japan, he was shown a motion picture of the execution of a captured Chinese spy. The effect was instantaneous. From that moment, believing that the disease of China was mental rather than physical, he gave up his early ambitions of becoming a doctor and returned to China. He had visions of going to Germany. He taught for a while in Chekiang and later at Peking University, and though he found comradeship among the students and professors, he remained restless to the end of his life. For him, as for Kuo Mo-jo, who later became for a while his bitterest enemy, the responsibilities of literature

were so vast that he almost quailed before them. Kuo Mo-jo had also studied medicine in Japan and returned in disgust. He says in *Crossroads* 'What the devil is the use of studying medicine. You can kill parasites and germs, but how can you kill the loathsome social system which breeds them? It is comparatively easy to give the rich a dose of Epsom salts for their stomach troubles, but when you see the poor run down by motorcars and armed soldiers slaughtering thousands of your fellow countrymen, those same fellow countrymen for whom you have to provide medicines and bandages . . . There's nothing a doctor can do. Fraternity? Humanity? If you have a clear conscience and don't squeeze, you will become a saint. And how can I become a saint?' Kuo Mo-jo surrendered. He saw no way out, and with the help of Yu Ta-fu, Chang Tzi-p'ing, T'ien Han and Chen Fang-wu, founded a literary society in opposition to the *Literary Research Society* which was dominated by Lu Hsun. This new school, founded in 1922 and known as the *Creationist Society*, demanded the complete separation of literature and dogma. 'The genuine artist', said Chen Fang-wu, their spokesman, 'is dedicated to perfect beauty, since in beauty lies truth and virtue itself'. It was hardly the school of the ivory tower, there were too many virile elements in it, but it was essentially reactionary and offered illimitable hostages to the enemy. Without any definite aim many of its authors sank into self-pity. Kuo Mo-jo has become a brilliant if sometimes wrong-headed critic, and there is a virility in his prose and his plays which is not altogether unworthy of him. But the self-pitying prose of Yu Ta-fu led to an inevitable defeat. Chinese literature could not remain eternally on a level of self-commiseration, and Lu Hsun had only to wait to see the whole of Chinese literature point in the way he had foreshadowed.

But though Yu Ta-fu was occasionally nauseating, he was himself the symptom of a disease. There are moments when he writes like an angel, with depths of understanding of the problems that face adolescents, in a prose that sings. Like Lu Hsun, and later Pa Chin, he cries out for freedom against the suffocating shackles of a decayed tradition. He demands free love or at least that love should be more free than it is. He demands that suffering—particularly his own suffering—should be comforted, and at the same time he knows no method by which it may be alleviated. Lu Hsun had insisted that art should be the companion of the social reformer, a mailed fist in a velvet glove. Neither Yu Ta-fu nor Chang Tzi-p'ing (who invented for a Chinese audience the triangular love-story) had any desire to be more than the velvet glove. They are justly forgotten, but hardly anyone can read the stories of Yu Ta-fu without wishing that he had written with a greater responsibility. He wrote with a delightful understanding of the vernacular, and there is a lyrical sweep in some of his early stories which seems to have disappeared entirely from the Chinese scene.

The two movements, one believing in the purity of art and the other in art as the handmaid of social reform, were not entirely separated. There were bridges between them, and writers moved from one to the other with disconcerting rapidity. Among these was Shi Chê-ts'un, who at different times belonged to both, and seems to have absorbed both influences. Neither a romantic nor a social reformer, he was the first Chinese writer to be influenced by the innovations of Freud, while Yang Chen-shen, later to become President of Shantung University, seems to have escaped all influences except those that spring from his love of the sea-coast and a connoisseur's knowledge of ancient Chinese painting and calligraphy. It is perhaps not without significance that his

story *The Anchor* is among the most brutal included in this book. He shares with Feng Fei-ming, the author of *The Bridge* and *Mr. Perhaps*, a garrulous and delicate study of a Chinese scholar written in the most subtle prose imaginable, the distinction of being most purely himself.

The two movements came to an end, as all movements must. The atmosphere of political chaos increased as the twenties advanced. Between the death of Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1924 and the successful conclusion of the Second Revolution in 1927, a new orientation occurred, and writers who had previously refused to take part in the political and social movements of the times found themselves inextricably involved. Lu Hsun, Kuo Mo-jo and Mao Tun were among those who took a leading part in political activities. Even the Creationists, who once believed in art for art's sake, were heard to disparage their former creed. They announced—a little weakly—that art was for the sake of life.

But even with the success of the Kuomintang Revolution and the establishment of the Nanking Government in 1927, China was not at peace. Something of the furnace through which China passed may be gathered from the novels and stories of Mao Tun, who visited Canton, at that time the headquarters of the Kuomintang Party, in January 1926 and proceeded to follow the revolutionary armies during the following year as a propaganda officer until, with the split between the Kuomintang and the Communists, he left for Shanghai. Carefully and delicately, and yet with an underlying roughness, he has described the sufferings of that forgotten time. The age was 'a burning furnace, a whirlpool, a bundle of contradictions'. Deftly and realistically, without great art but with tremendous power, he described the events of the fatal year in a trilogy *Disillusion*, *Mutation* and *Pursuit*, where the psychological changes wrought by the

victory, which was not entirely a victory, are studied with a kind of objective ruthlessness. All are described. None are left out. The torturers, the tortured, the sceptics, the defeatists, the rich bankers and the prostitutes are analysed and dissected until the springs of their consciousness are revealed. His next novel, comparable with André Malraux's *La Condition Humaine*, describes the shoddy adventures of bankers in Shanghai. In his later work he has returned to the peasants, whom he seems to fear and love with equal intensity. In *Spring Silkworm*, *Winter Fantasies* and *Autumn Harvest* he describes with a wealth of authentic detail the peasantry of his native province. In his preface to *Wild Roses*, a collection of five short stories, he wrote 'Do not be sentimental over the past, and form no wistful visions of the future. Scrutinize, analyse, reveal the real and the actual'. It is a command which he has obeyed implicitly in the hard glare which he sheds on his characters: there is neither comfort nor peace.

Ting Ling is more comfortable, in spite of the revolutionary character of most of her writings. With abundant sympathy and a natural grace of writing, she combines an extraordinarily acute vision; and when she speaks of human love she continues an ancient tradition among Chinese writers, who are among the most sensual in the world. Her short story *The Flood* remains among the wisest and most sympathetic expressions of 'the sorrow of China'. She can write with pathos, but she can also be turgid. There are moments in reading her novels and short stories when one believes that she is the greatest after Lu Hsun that modern China has produced, there are other moments when one cries out in despair against the prose which seems to have been written by someone spellbound by her own voice. But in her descriptions of love she reaches heights which are rarely reached.

elsewhere In the story *Weihsu* two lovers are awakening in the morning

“The bedroom was flooded with the first sunshine coming through the gauzy screen Weihsu woke up, and without thinking of anything at all, he gazed at her hair which lay languidly over her arm, and her creamy neck with its soft down of hair A sweet, warm fragrance issued from every pore of her body, tasting almost like milk He tried not to disturb her, because she was more beautiful when she was asleep and her beauty made him shiver with pleasure Almost without knowing it, he turned over and woke her up “Darling,” she said, “where are your arms? Wrap me in your arms, please ” She opened her eyes They embraced tightly, showering each other with kisses With her head lying against the pillows her eyes somehow looked bigger, and after several attempts he succeeded in kissing her eyeballs Some pearly tears were forced out of them, but she was not in the least annoyed.”

Two other writers, both natives of Hunan and both influenced in varying degrees by Lu Hsun, deserve to be singled out. Chang T'ien-yi first came into prominence about 1930, and like Shen Ts'ung-wen he derives his strength from a lyrical understanding of the peasant character. Like Shen Ts'ung-wen (though it is only fair to add that Shen Ts'ung-wen has repeatedly denied that he writes with compassion), his sympathy for the peasants against the landlords and the tax-gatherers leads him to passages of bitter denunciation which are all the more effective by being perfectly controlled. In *Hatred* the dispossessed villagers, who have seen their village occupied by marauding soldiers and their own folk massacred, come upon some unarmed soldiers in their wanderings. At first they have no other desire but to wreak vengeance, but compassion intervenes and they discover that the soldiers belong to the same human family as themselves. Against a nightmare landscape of scorching

sand, the fate of the soldiers hangs in suspense, and we feel that the particular landscape he has described is at once the general and particular landscape of all our lives. In *The Breasts of a Girl* the relentless pursuit of the girl by the landlord, with all its violence and brutality, conceals almost the same moral. Chang T'ien-yi is usually known as a satirist, but his roots are too firmly planted in the Chinese soil to allow him to feed on satire alone. No other modern Chinese writer has described violence so vividly, and at the same time so compassionately. 'In the human nerve system', he once wrote, 'there must be a nerve which has not yet been discovered by the physiologist—the nerve of contradiction and inconsistency.' And if, as an artist, he is not so scrupulously exact as his master Lu Hsun, his knowledge of the 'nerve of contradiction and inconsistency' gives him a greater freedom of understanding. Lu Hsun writes vividly, but Chang T'ien-yi can bring all the colours and sensations of the Chinese countryside to your eyes, and he can convey sensations with an *immediacy* which is totally lacking in the more classical writer.

Shen Ts'ung-wen, with as great a range of experience as Chang T'ien-yi and with a style which possesses a chiselled perfection and the most perfect cadences which have been heard in modern China, combines a deep sympathy of the peasants and a quite peculiarly accurate vision. Like Lu Hsun, who nearly always wrote about the village of Luchen, he has an abiding sense of place, and nearly always writes about the villages along the Chen River in West Hunan—the sailors, the prostitutes, the civil servants, the garrison soldiers, and the wild tribesmen of the hills, whose customs are celebrated in at least six of his best stories. In twilight or under moonlight, on the rivers and hills of his native place, this contemplative scholar finds his continual sustenance. His career is unique

With no axe to grind, writing a prose which is often as intricate as poetry, he has come into the forefront of Chinese writers. He is like a mirror, reflecting the earth and skies of Hunan. It is necessary that one should interpose a warning here. He has been criticized because he has insisted on the beauty of the Hunanese, both the men and the women, but those who have been in Hunan can testify that they are as beautiful as he has described.

Shen Ts'ung-wen's early stories can be compared with Goiki's. A fierce exaltation flows through them. Like Chang T'ien-yi he can bring the colours of a place, its smells and sounds, directly before your eyes. Unlike Chang T'ien-yi he has no particular love for describing brutality. As a boy he was a wanderer. He joined the army, where he witnessed innumerable executions, and at last coming to Peiping joined the *Crescent Society*, which included among its members at various times nearly all the poets who were later to become famous—Hsu Chih-mo, Wen Yi-to, Tai Wang-shu and Pien Chih-lin. Most of them were busily imbibing foreign influences, but except for an early addiction to the novels of Dickens in translation Shen Ts'ung-wen seems to have been inspired only by two influences—his great love for Hunan and his passionate delight in the Chinese language.

The invasion of Manchuria in 1931 introduced a completely new note into Chinese literature. The Right and the Left remained, but the urgency of the times demanded the expression of a purely national *ethos*. The fighting spirit born with Lu Hsun was coming to its maturity, and it was particularly noticeable among the writers of the three north-eastern provinces. In Hsiao Chun, the author of *Village in August* and *The Third Generation*, we meet for the first time the note of passionate resistance to the enemy. In his

introduction to *The Story of Green Leaves*, a collection of essays and poems, he wrote

‘I was born and brought up in Northern Manchuria, for whose pure boundless snowy plains I have an abiding love. I love the endless depths of her blue sky, her ink-dark forests of pines and cypresses, her straight branches and maples thrusting into the clouds, shining with silver, I love the herds of cattle wandering over the plains like the waves of a sea, and above all I love her fearless honest people. The whirling snowflakes, the roaring winds, may cut my face like knives, but I love them all. And now I feel to the depths of my heart a great loneliness, for I no longer have that frozen and refreshing air against my face, and my lungs are numbed. They say that the spring in the south of China is like poetry, but it means nothing to me since I have lost my home.’

What is important to recognize is that this feeling for a particular province had hardly existed before. In *Village in August* Manchuria is celebrated tenderly, crudely, without art and yet with an effortless unconscious art which gives the book a peculiar validity. Hsiao Chun has a deep pity for the dispossessed and a bitter hatred for the Japanese. He triumphed, because he was the first novelist to celebrate the causes for which the whole nation was so soon to fight.

A younger but no less distinguished writer is Tuan-mu Hung-liang, who is represented here with two stories describing his native Manchuria. They are stories of violence, but there is always in his work an undercurrent of deep lyrical feeling. There is brutality in many of the stories included here, but this is not the time when brutality must be excused or condemned. Tuan-mu Hung-liang's excellence lies, like that of Shen Ts'ung-wen, to whom he has at times a curious similarity, in his sense of atmosphere and character. *Tiger* is a story of revenge, half playful in spite of its gruesome ending. *The Sorrows of the Lake of Egrets* has something

of the atmosphere of Lu Fen's *The Widow*, a sense of the remote and fabulous corners of the earth and of the fabulous and terrible secrets which lie in the individual soul Tuan-mu Hung-liang has also dissected the nerve of inconsistency, and found that there are consistencies in inconsistency. In the gentle blooded light of his imagination a flame burns continually.

Modern Chinese literature is still in its youth. The war has been in many ways a blessing in disguise: it has brought writers face to face with the realities of their land, and at the same time it has made publishing increasingly difficult. Not all whom we wanted to include here are represented. With the capture of Kweilin it became impossible to find the collections of stories we wanted, and it is hoped that a second volume will include many who were unavailable at the time. In China nearly all the writers have been caught up by the furious impact of the war. Some, like the poet Pien Chih-lin, whose *The Red Trousers* is included here, have worked with the guerrillas, others, like Yang Chen-shen and Shen Ts'ung-wen, have wandered over the whole of China to find respite at last in the south-west. The growing pains of Chinese writers are not yet over, but the nation which can produce Lu Hsun, Shen Ts'ung-wen, Chang T'ien-yi, Tuan-mu Hung-liang and Hsiao Chun should have no fear for the future.

We acknowledge with gratitude the kindness of many Chinese writers who have assisted us in collecting materials and making translations, in particular Mr. George Yeh, Mr. Yang Chou-han, Mr. Ch'i Shen-chiao, Mrs. Yuan Chien Kuo-ying, Mr. Cicio Mar, Mr. Li Kuan-tien and Mr. Ching Ti.

YUAN CHIA-HUA

ROBERT PAYNE

LU HSUN

THE WAVES OF THE WIND

OVER the fairymaid near the river the setting sun slowly withdrew its beams. The sunbunt leaves of the tallow trees near the river bank began to revive and make a rustling sound, and here and there were to be found mosquitoes dancing beneath them. The streams of black smoke, which poured from the chimneys of the thatched roofs facing the river, grew more slender, and the women and children were busily spattering clean water on the ground in front of their front doors and moving out tables and stools. It was already supper time.

The elders sat on the stools, brandishing their large palm-leaf fans and chattering. The children darted to and fro, or crouched beneath the tallow trees playing pebbles. The women were bringing out bowls of salt vegetables and yellow rice, still hot and steaming. Small boats floated on the river, and if there had been a poet on board he might have said that the life of the peasants was a kind of heavenly bliss.

Such a comment, however, would have been irrelevant and untrue, because the poet would not have heard the remarks of Old Grandma Nine Ching. At that moment Old Grandma Nine Ching was in a rage. 'I have lived seventy-nine years', she said, striking the leg of her stool with a palm-leaf fan. 'I have lived enough. I would rather not have witnessed the degeneration of the young. I ought to die. There they are the supper all ready under their noses, and they keep on eating baked beans. That's the way to bring a family to destruction.'

Her great-granddaughter Six Ching, with her hands full of baked beans, approached the table. Hearing the old woman's words, she turned swiftly away and rushed down to the river bank, where she hid behind a tallow tree. With

infinite cunning the little girl stretched out her head, from which two round knots of braided hair fell along her cheeks, and she said loudly 'You old witch, why don't you die?'

Old Grandma Nine Ching, though not in the least deaf, did not hear these words and kept on muttering to herself: 'Every generation is more degraded than the last'

In this village a peculiar habit prevailed. At birth every infant was weighed on a steelyard, and the actual number of *ching* which it weighed would form part of its name. Ever since her fiftieth birthday old Grandma Nine Ching had taken to grumbling. She would say that in her younger days the weather had never been so hot, nor the dried beans so hard. The world had changed for the worse. Six Ching was three *ching* less than her great-grandfather, and one *ching* less than her father. All this was indisputable. 'Every generation is worse than the former one', she would say emphatically.

Her granddaughter-in-law, who was Seven Ching's wife, came to the table with a basketful of rice in her arms. Throwing the ricebasket down on the table, she said resentfully 'Always harping on the same subject, eh? But Six Ching at her birth actually weighed six *ching* and six and a half *liang*. That steelyard of yours is all wrong, and each *ching* on your steelyard is eighteen *liang*—not sixteen, as it should be. If we had used a standard steelyard, it would have been seven *ching*. And do you know, I believe the old steelyard which weighed grandpa only had fourteen *liang* . . .'

'Every generation is more debased than the former . . .'

Seven Ching's wife was about to make a retort when she noticed Seven Ching himself coming out of a small lane. She turned to him quickly and said 'You living corpse, what do you mean by being so late? Where have you been? We're all waiting for you, and the rice is growing cold on the table'.

Although Seven Ching had lived all his life in the village,

he had long ago come to the conclusion that he was superior to the villagers. From the time of his grandfather to his own day, three generations had not touched the plough or sown seed. He spent his time on a merchant vessel which sailed between Luchen and a neighbouring city. The vessel started in the early morning and returned before nightfall, and in this way the merchant kept in touch with the events of the outside world. If a centipede had been killed or a girl gave birth to a monster, he was always the first to know of it, and naturally he became a person of considerable importance in the village. Nevertheless, according to the old country custom, supper must be served in daylight and without candles, and he was therefore rightfully reproached for his late return.

Seven Ching held in one hand a polished bamboo pipe six feet long with a whitish brass bowl and an ivory mouth-piece. He looked down to the ground as he walked slowly up to the table and sat down on a stool. Seeing her opportunity, Six Ching darted from behind the tallow tree where she had been hiding and sat down beside her father. 'Papa', she murmured. But there was no answering smile from her father.

'Every generation is more debased than the former', old Grandma Nine Ching said.

Seven Ching looked up and said in a sighing voice. 'The Emperor has returned to his throne'.

Seven Ching's wife was stupefied by the news. Suddenly she explained. 'But how nice, don't you think? Then the Emperor will give pardon to all the sinners and criminals'.

Seven Ching sighed again, saying. 'I've cut off my pigtail'.

'Does the Emperor want everyone to have a pigtail?'

'Of course he does'.

'How do you know?' his wife asked impatiently.

'Everyone in the Inn of Prosperity says as much.'

Now Seven Ching's wife became really frightened. The Inn of Prosperity was the centre of all local news. Looking at Seven Ching's bald head, she found it impossible to contain her anguish. She filled a bowl of rice and almost threw it at her husband, saying 'You'd better eat it up. Pulling a long face won't help you grow a pigtail.'

The sun at last withdrew its beams, and over the river a cool damp crept stealthily onward. The splintering sound of bowls against chopsticks continued, and everyone felt pearly drops of sweat crawling along their spines. Seven Ching's wife finished her three bowls of rice, and her heart was thumping. Through the leaves of the fallow trees she noticed old Chao Seven strolling across a small wooden bridge towards them. He was wearing a long gown of sky-blue calico.

Chao Seven was the proprietor of the Inn of Flowers, and the only figure of eminence and scholarship in the neighbourhood. Profound learning gave him the air of a retired official. He owned a complete set of *The Three Kingdoms* in ten volumes, and he would often sit up for hours reading the book. Since the Revolution of 1911 he had worn his pigtail coiled up on top of his head, and he would often say that if Chao Tze-lung, one of the heroes of *The Three Kingdoms*, had been alive, the world could not possibly have been in such chaos. Seven Ching's wife had extremely good eyesight, and she was able to see from a distance that Chao Seven had uncoiled his pigtail, which fell down his back in a beautiful black glossy queue. At the same moment she was absolutely convinced that the Emperor had returned to the throne, that the Emperor resolutely insisted on his people wearing pigtails, and that her husband was henceforth involved in an extremely delicate situation. It was very seldom that Chao Seven wore his sky-blue gown. In the last three years he had worn it only twice: once when his enemy Pockmarked Ah-Tzu was

seriously ill, and then again when Oldest Lu died. Oldest Lu had on one occasion seriously damaged his inn. It was quite clear that Chao Seven was enjoying a triumph.

And Seven Ching's wife remembered another thing. Two years previously Seven Ching had been drunk and he had cursed Chao Seven, calling him 'cheapjack'.

As Chao Seven passed the countryfolk at their meals, they had all stood and pointed to their ricebowls with their chopsticks and said in unison: 'Seventh Master, please have supper with us'. But he had merely passed them by, saying '*Chin, chin*', and it was not till he reached the table where Seven Ching's family were sitting that he paused. They, too, rose to their feet and begged him to eat with them. He said '*Chin, chin*' as before, and began carefully to scrutinize their dishes.

'The dried vegetables look delicious . . . Have you heard any news recently?' he said, standing behind Seven Ching and facing Seven Ching's wife.

'The Emperor, it seems, has returned to the throne', Seven Ching said dully.

Seven Ching's wife smiled, gazing at Chao Seven.

'Yes', she said, 'I hear the Emperor has returned to the throne. I suppose His Highness will forgive all the sinners and criminals now.'

'Well, sooner or later', answered Chao Seven, looking unusually serious. 'But, my poor Seven Ching, what have you done with your pigtail? It's a very important matter — a pigtail. Don't you remember the Taiping rebellion? Those who kept their hair could not keep their heads, and those who kept their heads did not keep their hair . . .'

Seven Ching and his wife were both untutored, and therefore they were unable to understand the old allusions. But they knew that Chao Seven was a scholar whose words were

always true, and they knew too that the situation was irrevocably grave. They were speechless, as though they had been sentenced to death or as though a thunderbolt had fallen nearby.

'Each generation is more depraved than . . .', Old Grandma Nine Ching had been grumbling away, and now she took the opportunity of addressing Chao Seven. 'These modern rebels have strange habits—they cut off people's hair, so that everyone looks like a monk. I have lived seventy years. I have lived enough. The royal princes wore yellow silk, yes, yellow silk and red silk . . . I have lived enough—seventy-nine years already . . .'

Chao Seven shook his head. 'A great pity', he said. 'Not to have a pigtail is a serious offence, surely. It is all written in the book without the slightest ambiguity. And even if there are great protectors in the family—even then, it remains a very great offence.'

Seven Ching's wife, realizing that it was all written in the book, gave up the last vestiges of hope. She seemed to have been driven into a blind alley, where it was impossible even to revenge herself on her husband. She pointed at the tip of Seven Ching's nose with her chopsticks and said: 'You living corpse, now you are going to reap what you have sown. When the revolution came, didn't I tell you not to go to the town on your boat? No, you didn't listen. You made up all sorts of excuses and you went to the town, and as soon as you reached the town they got hold of you and cut off your pigtail—such a nice dark pigtail. You living corpse, now you are going to reap what you have sown . . .'

Since Chao Seven's arrival in the village, the other villagers hastily finished their meals and came running up to the table where Seven Ching and his family were eating. Seven Ching, who was accustomed to regard himself as a respectable person,

was deeply humiliated by his wife's remarks in front of the others, and in an effort to rid himself of his embarrassment he remarked in a quiet voice

'Today you know what to say, but in those days'

'You living corpse!'

Among the bystanders Eight One's wife was by far the most kind-hearted. With her two-year-old son in her arms, she was standing close to Seven Ching's wife, and enjoying the quarrel. At the same time she was exceedingly sorry for them. 'Elder Sister,' she murmured to Seven Ching's wife, 'don't be angry. Men are not gods. Who can foresee what is going to happen?' As I remember, Elder Sister, at that time you were saying that a man without a pigtail did not look worse than before. And there's another thing, the mayor of the town hasn't issued a proclamation yet.

Seven Ching's wife could not bear to listen to all this. Still holding the chopsticks and pointing them at the other woman's nose, she exclaimed. 'You don't know what you are saying. I think I am a decent woman. How could I have said such absurd things?' I remember now how I wept for three whole days, and everybody saw me. . . even that devil Six Ching wept too. . .' Six Ching had just finished a large bowl of rice and was holding out her bowl for more. Seven Ching's wife saw her and clapped her over the head with the pair of chopsticks. 'Hold your tongue!' she complained in a harsh voice. 'Who wants to listen to an unchaste widow, eh?'

At that moment the empty bowl in Six Ching's hand fell with a clatter to the ground, and a large piece broke off the brim. Seven Ching sprang to his feet and picked up the broken bowl, examining the two pieces carefully and trying to put them together. 'Mother's!' he cursed, slapping Six Ching over the ears. The girl fell to the ground and stretched herself out at full length, crying aloud. Old Grandma Nine

Ching shook her head and led the gull away, and all the while she was muttering to herself 'Each generation is wiser than the other. . . '

Eight One's wife was also infuriated and shouted at Seven Ching's wife

'You're a spiteful, beastly, stupid young woman—that's what you are!'

Meanwhile Chao Seven had taken the part of a spectator, but suddenly remembering the remark that the mayor had not yet issued a proclamation, he began to revert to the old theme 'You know,' he said, 'the Imperial Army will be passing through here sooner or later. Well, the Imperial Army is going to be led by a certain General Chang, who is a descendant of Chang Yi-tê, one of the great tiger generals mentioned in *The Three Kingdoms*. He has a serpentine spear eighteen feet long. Even one who can resist an army of ten thousand will not be able to stand a thrust from his spear. . . .' All the time he was grasping his hands firmly together as though he were holding the serpentine spear. Then he stepped a few inches forward and addressed Eight One's wife with the words: 'Could you resist such a man?'

Eight One's wife, with the child in her arms, trembled with anger and fear. She was terrified by the sight of Chao Seven, who was approaching her, his face drooping with sweat. She walked away, and Chao Seven followed her, while all the others stepped back to make way for them, blaming the woman for meddling in affairs which did not concern her. 'Well, could you resist such a man?' Chao Seven was heard to say when he reached the bridge. Immediately afterwards he strode off with his head in the air.

The villagers were dumbfounded. They turned the matter over and over in their minds and they were all convinced that no one could resist Chang Yi-tê, and therefore Seven

Ching was unlikely to save his head. They recalled how in former days Seven Ching, with the long pipe in his mouth, had harangued them haughtily on the news he brought back from town. Now that he himself had violated the imperial decree, they were secretly pleased. Murmurs and whispers came from them, and these murmurs and whispers were mingled with the droning hum of the mosquitoes which danced over their naked chests and then disappeared into the shadows of the tallow trees. Gradually they dispersed, went back to their own homes, closed their doors and went to bed. Seven Ching's wife was kept busy moving the stools and tables, but she too kept muttering indistinctly to herself. At last she closed the door and went to bed with her daughter.

Seven Ching returned with the broken bowl and sat on the threshold. Overwhelmed with melancholy, he forgot to puff at the ivory mouthpiece of his bamboo pipe, and he let the spalk in the whitish brass bowl darken and die out. His mind was entirely engrossed by the portentous and invisible danger which lay in front of him, and from which he could find no way out. He tried to form plans, but everything was so entangled and obscure that he failed completely to arrive at any logical conclusion. 'The pigtail, that's the problem. . . . A serpentine spear, eighteen feet long . . . Every generation is more debased than . . . And the Emperor has returned to his throne, and the broken bowl has to be taken to the town to be repaired. Who can resist such a man? It is all clearly written in the book Mother's!'

As usual, Seven Ching got up early the next morning and went to work on the boat. He kept poling until at last the boat reached the town, and when he returned again towards evening at Luchen he was still holding the bamboo pipe, which was six feet long, and in addition he had the repaired ricebowl. At supper he explained to Old Grandma Nine

Ching how the repairing had been done. It had been a large break and sixteen brass nails had been employed. Each nail had cost three coins, and therefore he had paid forty-eight coins altogether.

Old Grandma Nine Ching showed resentment at the expense.

'Each generation is wiser than the one that went before', she complained. 'I have lived long enough. One nail costs three coins. I have never heard such a thing. In former days, each nail cost . . . I have lived seventy-nine years!'

Seven Ching still went into the town daily, but the atmosphere of his house was becoming increasingly melancholy. All the villagers appeared to avoid him, and they no longer paid any attention to the news he brought back from the town. His wife continued to call him 'a living corpse'.

Ten days later, on his return from the town, his wife looked at him with an unexpectedly kind expression.

'Have you heard any news?' she asked.

'Nothing.'

'Has the Emperor really returned to the throne?'

'No one told me . . .'

'You mean, in the Inn of Prosperity no one said anything?'

'No.'

'It looks as though the Emperor wasn't enthroned after all. Today I passed by the inn belonging to Chao Seven, and there he was sitting over his book. He has his pigtail coiled up again, and what is more, he is not wearing the gown.'

'Well . . .'

'I have a feeling that he hasn't returned to the throne.'

'That makes sense.'

From that moment Seven Ching resumed his ancient eminence. His wife and the villagers once more gazed upon

him with respect, and paid him compliments. In summer the family continue to have supper in the farmyard, and the neighbours still come up to them with smiling faces. Old Grandma Nine Ching has already celebrated her eightieth birthday, healthy and grumbling as ever. The two round tresses of Six Ching's hair have formed into real pigtails, and though her feet are newly bound, she still helps her mother in the housework. She can often be seen walking in the courtyard, hobbling a little like a cripple, holding in her hand a ricebowl with sixteen brass nails fixed into it.

The Manchus ordered the Chinese to wear pigtails, and though the habit was broken with the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty, the restoration of the Boy Emperor P'u Yi to the throne for eighty-seven days in 1917, meant that the old customs might be forcibly restored. Hence the excitement of the peasants in this story.

YANG CHEN-SHEN
THE ANCHOR

It was spring, and the fishing season

Along the southern coast of the Evergreen Island there were people giggling and talking on the sandy beaches. There were women in red trousers and girls with red embroidered eel-shaped slippers sitting in the sun and mending their nets. They were telling each other stories of mermen and mermaids who had lived among the desolate islands. From the sea you heard fishermen's songs, coming from different ships, and all of them low and melancholy.

When the setting sun overlaid the beach with gold, the waves began to quicken, and then the hollow, sadly majestic tide of evening swallowed up the girls' voices and their giggling laughter, and now at last they began to think of returning home. Meanwhile they stared vaguely across the sea towards the fishermen. In their hearts they mildly accused them of being late, but the fishing-boats were already returning, while the worn-out evening glowed on their sails through the pale-blue mist which hung over the water.

Before long the whole coast was lined up with fishing-boats. Their masts stretched for miles, rocking gently on rippling waves like an autumn forest on a windy day. With a sudden roar all the women and the children swarmed towards the boats. They were like maddened bees, in their desire to reach the fish. They swore at one another and joked while they lifted the fish in their hands—the tender-skinned herrings with their soft flesh, the big-headed fish richly and gloriously dressed so that they resembled great gentlemen, mackerels like swaggering country bullies and black eels which revolved their heads like slippery thieves, and there

were globe-fish with blunt tails turned awry, and there were others with mouths wide open and gazing in wonder.

At that moment Mu San, who was bare to the waist and whose flesh in this light appeared to be purple, nudged his way through the crowd and leapt on to Li Erh's boat. Without a word he stepped down into the boat and proceeded to gather up the fish.

Li Erh went up to him and caught him by the arm.

'Pay your debt first', he said. 'Then you can gather the fish!'

'Lend me another *pikul*, and I'll pay you next time', Mu San answered without giving him a glance.

'That won't do!'

'No?'

Mu San stood up straight and glared at Li Erh angrily.

'When I say it won't do, it won't do! It's broad daylight now', Li Erh said, staring back at him. 'Are you going to steal?'

'All right—just step off this boat!' Mu San shouted, jumping ashore and throwing down a challenge for a fight.

'All right—I have no objection. See what you can do', Li Erh answered, and followed him ashore.

Mu San immediately struck his opponent a blow which sent him reeling. Li Erh tried to keep his balance, but he fell down.

The crowd heard them and gathered round. The islanders enjoy a fight as much as townspeople enjoy a cockfight. No one wanted to separate them. Li Erh got to his feet, feeling ashamed of himself, but suddenly he darted forward and struck out at Mu San's head. It was a heavy blow, but Mu San only raised his arms and warded it off. Then Li Erh kicked Mu San in the ribs with his left foot, and Mu San, forced to retreat a little, managed to catch hold of the foot.

It was all over then. There was L1 Erh on the ground again, face upward, like a squirming frog.

When L1 Erh got up again he did not know what to do with his hands and his feet. He was desperate, and made for Mu San's stomach with his head. Mu San dodged to one side. L1 Erh fell forward and danced off, unable to stand still. Mu San helped him by kicking him in the backside, and suddenly, with a loud thud L1 Erh dropped to the ground, his nose rubbing against the ground like a sow.

'Bah!' Mu San turned away, too proud to continue the fight.

'Lend me a *pikul*', he said, jumping on board Wang Wu's boat.

'All right, I'll lend you a *pikul*—who's to blame that we are neighbours?' Wang Wu replied. He had grown wise and had no desire to be insulted.

When darkness crept over the island from the sea, no one was left on the beach. The tide hissed as it fell against the silent gravel. From afar, from the village, came the sound of the fish-hawkers, and their lanthorns glittered in the dark, deserted alleyways like will-o'-the-wisps.

By the time the night watchman's hammer had struck the second watch, Mu San's load of fish had changed into money which reposed in his waist-bag. Smelling of fish all over, he went to knock at Ho Erh-ku's gate. The heavy taps on the wooden board of the gate woke up the dogs in the neighbourhood. Their barking became contagious, and soon the whole island reverberated with the sounds of barking. But within the gate everything was silent. He beat the gate like a drum and began cursing. 'What do you mean by laying up your corpse so early? Quickly, or the old man will come and kick it open for you!'

'Who is that, coming to disturb his old mother's sleep?'

'Your old man Open it quick No more damned airs'

'Oh, I wondered who it was The Black One, eh? You come in the nick of time Your old mother was asleep and longing for you', Ho Erh-ku answered, opening the gate.

As soon as Mu San entered the house, he thought he saw a shadow flitting past a dark corner, and he dashed forward in pursuit When he came to the corner, he found nothing there.

'Are you a witch trying to catch a devil?' cried Ho Erh-ku 'Do you imagine there are other devils who dare to come here beside yourself?'

Mu San came into the room, grumbling. The bedding in the *k'ang* was all awry The pillow, flattened, was in the middle. He dropped down on the *k'ang*, face upward, and cursed through gnashing teeth: 'You strumpet, you've got another whoremaster, I'm sure Wait till I meet him I'll peel his skin off'.

Ho Erh-ku, with her hair unloosened, her breast half-hidden by the crimson brassière, sat on the edge of the *k'ang* and said half-angrily and half-smilingly, 'My darling Black One, where did you drink so much yellow wine? Don't imagine you have seen anything, like the man who came to visit the city god's temple You should be afraid of the thunder if you wrong the innocent like this'

'Innocent', Mu San sneered 'You're the fox-bride who doesn't know where to hide her tail. Let me tell you—just go on teasing me They'll kill me if I kill anyone, and I might as well kill two.'

Ho Erh-ku suddenly jumped off the *k'ang* and said: 'Ever since you came, not even a ghost has dared to come to this place The house has become a nunnery. When you don't come, it's like living in a temple—my lamp is my only

companion'. She felt so hurt that she began to cry. 'On the least provocation you threaten to kill me Am I a nun who marries a saint? Must I remain faithful to one man even if he dies? If you want to kill, come and kill' She threw herself against Mu San's body. 'Good heavens, you're a thief who deserves beheading Where did you steal this money which gives your old mother such a bump on the head?' She had knocked her head against Mu San's money-bag Now she wiped away her tears with the corner of her jacket and smiled

'Let me count it for you', she said, untying the bag from Mu San's belt Standing by the table in the light of the kerosene lamp, she began to count the money in fives and tens

'You whore, as soon as you get money, you stop yelling, eh?' he smiled, turning over on the *k'ang*, rather pleased.

'There are three hundred and fifty-five coppers and two counterfeits', said Ho Erh-ku when she had finished counting.

'There were over five hundred there Whenever money passes through your hands it gets less', said Mu San.

'Darling, what are you talking about? I was going to buy some material tomorrow to stitch a pair of trousers. It isn't enough anyway.'

'You wear trousers! That's like a blind man lighting a lamp—waste! Ha, ha, ha!'

'Don't sit there talking such nonsense. Be good. I'm going to ride you—black donkey!'

The lights in the room went out. A cat mewed on the roof Bats fluttered along the eaves. A spider was weaving a net among dead branches.

Along the shore things were better organized. Mu San found it more difficult now to borrow fish, and for a few days he was unable to visit Ho Erh-ku.

When it drizzled the sea resembled a vast beehive. The fish swam up to the surface, and there was an abundance of fish. The fish-market became busy, and the whole island followed the activities of the fish. Mu San drifted along the beach, his head bent down, and he had no idea where he was going. The raindrops dripped on his clothes, but he was unconscious of them.

‘Hullo! Where are you off to?’

Mu San lifted up his head and saw Sun Hsiao-i in his straw-plaited raincoat sitting alone in his boat. He was staring at Mu San with his owl’s eyes. He was a boy of seventeen, his father had died the year before and he had inherited his only property—the boat and the net. He went out fishing to support his mother. Though he was a bully, Mu San had a great compassion for the poor boy, and had never borrowed fish from him. Hsiao-i regarded Mu San as a popular hero and worshipped him, and so he hailed him because he wanted to show him attention.

‘You don’t go out fishing—you just sit loafing, eh? You think the fish will come and find you out?’ There were times when Mu San said things appropriate to an elder.

‘No net’, the boy complained. ‘Liu Ssu took it away—said my father owed him money.’ Hsiao-i wiped his running nose with his fingers.

‘You——.’ Mu San stared at him. ‘You are like the wet rope the fool uses to bring down dates from the tree. You can never stand up straight. Any son of a bitch bullies you now, and you shrink back into your shell like a turtle. You think you can do everything by just hiding?’

‘Mother has gone out to borrow money. She thinks I can buy me a net. She has begged from everyone, but it’s no use.’

‘So you’ll wait till you starve to death, eh?’

Hsiao-i said nothing

'You are a man. Can't you think of some other way beside begging on your knees and calling people good names?'

Hsiao-i still kept silence

'The pickles of the sea-slug remain flesh. You're just like your father.' Mu San spat on the ground and went away.

When he had gone a few steps he turned back to look at Hsiao-i. Hsiao-i sat coiled up in his straw raincoat, his head in his hands, and he looked just like a startled hedgehog. Mu San shook his head in the way a mother disapproves of her impossible child. He was disappointed in the boy, but he could not just leave him. He turned back against his will. He stopped and hesitated. Then suddenly he bent forward and whispered in Hsiao-i's ear. Hsiao-i lifted up his head and saw a black face with a ferocious grin which bared the white teeth. The nose of the face let out a sneer. 'Do you have the courage?'

Hsiao-i's eyes grew wide open. He looked at the man. Gradually his head sank. He looked at the ground without a word.

Seeing that Hsiao-i showed signs of willingness, Mu San bent forward, caught him by the breast of his coat, lifted him from the ground and stood him up. He examined the boy from head to foot and nodded. 'You're well built—it won't be difficult to make a strong man out of you. Let's go!'

At midnight, at the same place, two shadows appeared on the beach. They crept into Hsiao-i's boat stealthily. There was a dip of the oars, and the boat left the coast for the sea. The rain had stopped, but it was still cloudy. On the sea there was darkness and silence. A few dots of crimson light came forth from the fishing-boats on the sea, hanging motionless in the damp, heavy air. The fishermen had cast their nets

into the current, and now they had fallen asleep, for it only remained to draw in the nets next morning and collect the fish. The black boat threaded its way among them without being perceived. On the contrary, with the help of the lights which hung on each boat, the two shadows could decide who was the master of each boat, and they whispered together.

'Is it this one?' asked Mu San.

'No, no. Liu Ssu's boat is a new one.' Hsiao-i's heart throbbed so violently that he thought it would leap out of his mouth.

They made a few turns more, and Hsiao-i bent over Mu San and began to whisper into his ear. Mu San stopped rowing, cocked his head and listened very carefully for any stir in the boat, but he heard only the indistinct sound of snoring. He steered round to the stern of Liu Ssu's boat, threw his body forward and picked up the leading rope of the net out of the water, pulling it into his own boat and, drawing an axe from his side, cutting it with a single blow. Liu Ssu's boat rocked for a few moments, but there was no sound in the boat. Then Mu San tied the rope to his own boat, and silently rowed away from the fishing-boats. When they were some distance away, they drew up the net and collected the fish with the greatest ease. It began to dawn. They calculated that before daybreak they would reach a neighbouring island, where they would sell the net and the fish.

Hsiao-i received some money and got a small net. With his share, Mu San went to stay at Ho Erh-ku's house. But Liu Ssu was not a man to be easily thwarted, and when the next day he discovered that the net had disappeared, he was quite certain who had stolen it. He went to the neighbouring

islands to inquire about the net. From the man who bought it, he discovered what the seller looked like, and what clothes he had worn. And then he was absolutely certain.

One evening he bought ten catties of white wine and a pig's head, and ordered his wife to cook the pig's head until it was very well done indeed, and he ordered her to pound sufficient onions for four plates. Then he went on a visit and invited ten of his neighbours to share the feast. Among them were Li Erh and Wang Wu.

The ten catties of white wine went into the stomachs of the ten men, and its effect was like pouring ten catties of gasoline on ten bundles of dried straw, which could be set alight with a tiny spark. When Liu Ssu had done all he could to entertain the guests, and when he had poured out for them the ten catties of white wine, he sighed and the tears came to his eyes. This softened the hearts of the ten rough fellows he had invited. They asked him why he was crying, but he did not reply. They felt depressed, and the ten catties of white wine began to work on their stomachs.

'If someone has wronged you, let me avenge you', one of them said; and he was so impatient that he struck the table with his fist.

'Come on—out with it! out with it! We'll avenge you!' They were so filled with a sense of righteousness that they began to stamp their feet and beat their chests.

'What is the use of talking, since nobody dares to provoke the man?' Liu Ssu let out another sigh.

There was an uproar among the guests, and they all shouted. 'Tell us, tell us. We aren't afraid of him even if he is a god!'

Between sighs, Liu Ssu answered: 'He has wronged me so much that I am ashamed to live. I must kill him or let him kill me. I don't mind if I am killed. I only worry about

my old ones and young ones I beg you, my honourable neighbours, look after them for a dead man's sake I will be grateful even in my grave'.

When the ten tough fellows had heard this, it was as though more fat had been poured on the fire. They shouted 'You are making us mad! Who is it? We'll avenge you! You don't have to come!'

Liu Ssu knelt on the ground and kowtowed to his guests. They were utterly amazed. They heard Liu Ssu saying 'I'll never be ungrateful, my good neighbours, if you help me with the strength of your arms—I'll never forget to my dying day. The man is Mu San!'

The words 'Mu San' made them almost sober. They suddenly became less vindictive. Then Liu Ssu began to tell them in great detail about how his net was stolen, and how there was no evil which Mu San had not performed, and how he had wronged an honest man, and similar accusations. And he added 'If we do not rid ourselves of this man, we shall never have peace to the end of our days'.

The white liquor began to work on the men's stomachs again, and they cried out 'Come on, we'll avenge you—it's all right' But the tone was not so forceful as before. Because each of them knew in his heart that the ten of them put together would be a match for Mu San, but what if later they should encounter him separately?

They looked at Liu Ssu and found him overwhelmed with melancholy. While they were hesitating, one of them said: 'Let's throw the anchor'. It was Li Erh with the bloodshot eyes.

'Good! Good! We don't want any bad consequences. If we beat a snake and don't kill it, it will turn round and bite us', Wang Wu explained.

This awakened their courage. The white liquor boiled

in their veins like a cauldron 'Throw the anchor! Throw the anchor!' Their very souls were intoxicated with the barbaric desire to kill

'Let's go and get him now', they all shouted

'Where is he?'

'He's at Ho Erh-ku's house I've made inquiries, and I'm quite sure' Liu Ssu had had everything arranged beforehand.

The crescent moon was shining obliquely on the islands which lay asleep on the sea. Only the soft pulse of the ripples along the shore could be heard, and these sounds only added to the sad and splendid desolation of the island. It was about the time of the second watch. Suddenly, in the alleyways, there arose the sound of disordered footsteps. Eleven strong men with fishing-forks, knives, poles and clubs in their hands were descending on Ho Erh-ku's house.

The light in the house was still on. From outside could be heard a violent wave of shouts and knockings, which awoke the neighbours.

The light in the house suddenly went out, and everything was silent within. The noise suddenly grew louder and more insistent. After a long while Ho Erh-ku was heard asking from within 'Who is this who comes knocking at my door at midnight? Even when you go to Buddha's house to offer incense, you must wait till cockcrow'.

'Open the gate quickly! We are looking for Mu San', they shouted.

'Oh, so you're looking for him?' He stopped coming here a long time ago. I haven't even seen his shadow lately. He's like a needle dropping into the great sea', Ho Erh-ku answered in leisurely tones. A tall, dark shadow jumped over the back wall and disappeared.

'Open it quickly—quickly! Stop your damned mouth!'

'You're only outlaws! When I say he is not here, he is not here. When did your old mother ever deceive you?'
Ho Erh-ku changed her tone

'Quickly, quickly, or we'll kick your gate down.' The voices from outside grew even more urgent

'I won't open it, I won't open it! If you break down the door, you'll have to pay for it'

'Let's jump over the wall', someone shouted

With a violent creak, Ho Erh-ku flung open the door.
'If you want to come in, come in. What's all the fuss about? The water is boiling in the cauldron and is only waiting for you turtles', she spat at them

They crowded inside. Ho Erh-ku retreated through her room door, and, with her hands resting at her sides, she said, gazing at them angrily. 'Well, what do you want?'

'We want to search', the men shouted

'What if you don't find anything?' she asked

'What if we do?' answered the men

'If you find anything, beat me to death. What if you don't?'

'Don't listen to that whore. Let's search.' With a cry, they rushed into the room. There was tumult. They searched the beddings, behind the door, under the table, inside the chest. There was nothing.

'Strange. I had definite word he was here', Liu Ssu said, scratching his head.

'We'll find him at the War God's temple', someone shouted.

'Let's go to the War God's temple. We'll search his rooms', the rest cried in chorus

'This won't do!' shouted Ho Erh-ku. 'You've turned everything upside down, you haven't found the man, and

now you go away with your tails between your legs. This won't do!

'What shall we do?' someone asked

'Don't trouble about the harlot. Let's go', shouted the others

They went away, while Ho Erh-ku yelled after them. Suddenly they heard Wang Wu, lingering behind and calling after them. 'Come here, come here'. He had picked up a felt cap at the foot of the *k'ang* and held it in his hand. When they first heard the words 'Come here', they were naturally frightened and nervous, but when they noticed that it was only a felt cap, their hearts no longer throbbed violently. On closer examination, they recognized that it was Mu San's cap. A sense of righteousness and revenge came over them.

'The whore is stowing him away. Tie her up. Demand the man from her', Liu Ssu bawled.

A tumult. A struggle. Using their hands and feet, they at last bound Ho Erh-ku's hands behind her back.

'Beat her! Torture her! Demand the man from her!' Liu Ssu shouted again.

Her hair dishevelled, Ho Erh-ku sneered. 'Don't display your blavery before me, I hid him. What of it? Let me tell you the truth. He's not in the War God's temple. I sent him away. I lent him travelling money. While you were making all the row here, he already left the island'.

They looked at one another. Their faces expressed a mixture of emotions: surprise, anger, contempt, the sense of having been mocked at, revenge. All these emotions found their target on the woman, and the venom they had intended for Mu San was thrown at her. The ten catties of white wine in their stomach had to find some outlet. So they decided to do to Ho Erh-ku what they had previously decided to do with Mu San.

'Throw the anchor!' This cry, handed down from the age of the first men, had never lost on this island, an island which had ever been regarded as uncivilized, its violence and arbitrariness—the threat to kill characteristic only of the first men. The resolution passed through their minds quickly, and needed no prompting.

As she was dragged towards the sea, Ho Eih-ku shouted 'Sons of bitches, you're all from bad families. No wonder Mu San beat you. Sons of bitches and beasts, Mu San has beaten thieves. Why did he beat you, and not the good people of the island? You, Liu Ssu, you're just a beast! You robbed a fatherless child, you cheated a widow, you took away another's net by force, and what right have you to complain when Mu San steals your fish?'

When she had said this, her courage left her. They were near the shore, and now she stopped accusing and only sobbed.

When they reached the shore, they tied her four limbs behind her back, like tying the four ends of a handkerchief into a knot. They brought out the sackcloth bag they had prepared beforehand, and they were about to put her in, when there suddenly appeared from behind them a tall, dark shadow, and this shadow shouted: 'Stop! What crime has she committed?'

They turned round in amazement, and in the light of the slanting moon they recognized Mu San. Their surprise was complete. But when they noticed that he had no weapons their courage returned, and they began to turn towards him, armed with their fishing-forks, knives, poles and clubs, ready to attack.

Mu San said coldly 'No fighting is needed. Set her free and bind me up. I stole the fish, not she.' As soon as he said this, he turned his back to them, crossed his arms behind his back and allowed them to bind him up.

At first they were dumbfounded, but immediately afterwards they closed in on him and tied up his arms. Mu San made no movement and said nothing.

They put Mu San into the cloth bag which they had intended for Ho Erh-ku, then they fastened a rock to it. Four of them carried it to a waiting boat. They steered out to sea, yelling a battle-cry, and then they threw the bag overboard. The cloth bag described large circular waves, which expanded and multiplied until at last all the thin circles disappeared. The peace of the sea was restored as if nothing had happened.

The men went away. The moon was going down and shining on Ho Erh-ku, who sat on the shore like a rock, gazing steadily out to sea.

A *k'ang* is a large divan-like stone bed used in North China. It is heated underneath, and often serves as a bed for a whole family, as well as a place for people to sit.

SHI CHÊ-TS'UN
THE WANING MOON

THE setting sun had fallen behind the roof, and silence began to prevail in the small courtyard

His wife lay there on the bed, reclining on three enormous cotton-padded pillows whose presence was dictated by her illness and also by a curious idiosyncrasy which she made no effort to hide. He sat in his usual place, beside the little narrow desk, with a pen in one hand and a piece of blank paper spread out before him. With the tip of his pen he was describing circles over the paper, absorbed in the contemplation of the short story he had not yet begun, prepared at any moment to catch the first word and impale it on the paper at the very moment of inspiration. But he had already assumed exactly the same attitude for three successive afternoons and evenings.

His wife was suffering from heart-disease, indigestion, irregular fever and a slight rheumatism. For seven weeks she had been lying in bed. And every morning he had had to walk two miles to the middle school where he was teaching, and as soon as he came home in the afternoon he would sit up in the bedroom to keep her company, and at the same time he would wait, sometimes till midnight, for the moment of inspiration. But it never came.

His brain seemed now to be almost deranged. If only he could grasp the most transient of ideas! There was no need for anything complicated—the simplest, most evanescent theme would be sufficient. His brain seemed to be breaking under the strain. For three days—nothing! There were moments of anguish when he would shake his pen convulsively, and a single drop of ink would escape from the pen and soil the white paper. Afterwards, he would reach

for another sheet of white paper, place it before him and continue to draw invisible circles in the air.

His wife was watching the sky through the lattice window. Dusk was coming on. She turned over on her side, and somehow this made her heart beat to a lighter rhythm. She sighed.

‘It’s going to be dark again.’

She did not mean to break the silence, and he paid no attention to her until at last it dawned on him that her casual remark coincided with the quick darkening of the room. Without a light he would no longer be able to write. He laid his pen down, felt for the switch which was hidden behind a heap of papers and turned on the electric light. He gazed at the window screen and once more plunged into meditation. He picked up his pen and laid it down again. Then he rose, walked to the window and pulled down the screen.

As he returned, his wife said.

‘Please make me a cup of tea.’

He poured her a cup of tea and silently brought it to the bedside, holding the cup at a distance of three feet from his wife’s lips. She made no effort to receive the cup, but instead she gazed fully at him.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ she said.

‘Nothing.’

‘Then why are you so silent?’

‘There’s nothing to say. Here’s a cup of tea for you.’

‘You know, you behave as though you don’t want to do it.’

Already confused in his mind, he grew sullen at her tone. He made an effort to control himself, saying: ‘No, with the greatest pleasure!’

‘Really? You know, even though I’m ill, my eyes are just as keen as they were.’

He was almost stupefied at these words. He left the teacup on a small round table near the bed, and returned to his desk.

and the sheet of blank paper. Suppose the clerk was a clerk in the law courts. He began to think hard. His wife showed no inclination to lift the teacup to her lips, and kept on murmuring

'You are no longer your old self, and I can see I am only a nuisance now. You don't need to apologize or make any excuses for yourself. Just think of the time when you were always kind to me. You would even put on my shoes, and one day, I remember it perfectly, we were walking out on the meadows and it was very muddy and my shoe got stuck in the mud. I sat on a rock, and you took my shoes and cleaned them and then put them on my feet. I remember it all perfectly.'

He was absorbed in his imaginary law clerk and at the same time he felt a wave of compassion for his wife. He remembered the doctor's orders that she should refrain from every kind of sentimentality. 'Yes,' he said, 'I remember it, too. I always like to do things for you. You know that I like doing things for you.'

He heard her sneering at him. It was absolutely necessary that he should dissolve the cloud of misunderstanding between them.

'How can you possibly think such things?' he said in an emphatic tone. 'I was absorbed in my work and I felt depressed—that's why I was silent. Please don't let your imagination run away with you, and please drink your tea.'

There was silence again. He thought her suspicions were allayed, and once more concentrated on his clerk. Suppose the clerk accepted a bribe and found himself involved in a lawsuit. . . and then some well-to-do gentleman. . . well, what would be the most appropriate thing. . . ?

His wife was slowly sipping the tea and at the same time she was running her left hand over her chest and over her stomach.

'I'm aching all over here', she said 'Do you think it is a sign of tuberculosis?'

'I don't know.'

'Do people suffering from tuberculosis feel a pain in the chest?'

'I don't know.'

'You don't seem to know much! There is a book on tuberculosis in the drawer. Please get it for me, because I want to make sure whether I am suffering from the symptoms .'

He turned round and glanced at his wife, then he put his pen on the table and went to the drawer, the drawer which his wife was pointing to with her left hand.

'Please read it yourself. I haven't got time to read. I am writing a short story.'

'Yes, I know. You don't like doing things for me—even the smallest thing. Isn't that true?'

He paid no further attention to her. The plot of the short story was gradually taking shape, and the only puzzle lay in the nature of the lawsuit. Suppose someone had a mind to construct a canal, or form a fire brigade, or increase the number of the police. . . . Which is best? Meanwhile, his wife was turning over the first pages of the book, but instead of reading, she was being carried away by a flow of irrelevant reminiscences.

'Yes', she was murmuring to herself 'You remember our walks together in the park. It was late autumn, and the maple leaves were red and they looked as though they were burning. There we were, sitting among those beautiful trees. We played a game and wrote letters on the leaves which had fallen, don't you remember? And we often went to the park in a cab, and it was always like being rocked in a cradle. I wonder when we shall ever visit the park again?'

He was paying no attention to her. Noticing this, she was alarmed and raised her voice:

‘Can you hear me? I was asking you—when are we going to take a cab and drive out to the park again?’

He turned and looked at her, annoyed. Then he made a great effort to resume a gentle composure and said sweetly

‘As soon as you are better, we shall go out again.’

‘Why must we wait till I am better? Who knows when I shall recover? We may not enjoy life so much as we did before, if the red leaves are falling and there’s a cruel winter everywhere. Besides, if I am suffering from tuberculosis, I may die before the winter sets in.’

He was a little alarmed by her pessimistic fancies which, if the doctor’s words were true, would only aggravate her illness. He thought these fancies might be the very cause of her illness. So he went to the bedside and said

‘Why do you say such things? All these fantastic ideas—— Why don’t you lie down and go to sleep quietly? If only you could keep yourself away from thoughts like those, you’d get better quickly, and then we would be able to take a cab to the park before the red leaves are falling.’

She listened attentively, her eyes wide open, but he had hardly finished talking when she was again carried away by a fanciful idea. ‘I feel,’ she said, ‘I feel . . . I wish you would sit on the bed nearer to me.’

‘Isn’t it the same if I sit at my desk?’

‘I’m not afraid of anything—only I feel that you ought to be nearer to me.’

‘You seem to have forgotten that I am writing something.’

‘Yes, I remember . . . But I want you to sit by me for a little while and say something sweet to me. Tell me what we used to talk about when we went to the park.’

In spite of his self-control, he was severely irritated by her stupid suggestion. ‘Do you think it is worth while to think always of the past, never doing anything serious?’ And he

went back to his desk and tried to resume his story. Why did the clerk accept the bribe? Obviously, it should be something with a bearing on public welfare. And the well-to-do gentleman in charge had somehow embezzled a large sum of money. Although nothing was disturbing him now, it was difficult to go on. He could not resist stealing a glance at his wife. She was gazing at the ceiling, evidently lost in her own meditations. A mysterious lingering smile hovered about her eyes, as though some beautiful object had appeared to her.

'I have just seen Little Ts'ai coming back to me.'

A sudden horror overwhelmed him. He sprung from his chair and went to her side. There was something strange in that smiling face of hers.

'What did you say?'

'What did I say? . . . I think I have just seen Little Ts'ai coming back to us.'

'Nonsense! You are just thinking of her again.'

'Yes, I was dreaming. But when shall we have the funeral?'

'As soon as you recover', he answered in a harsh voice, in which compassion, irritation and horror were equally mingled.

'Oh yes', she said, and she seemed to be thinking aloud, still gazing absent-mindedly at the ceiling. 'We must give her a beautiful funeral, and we ought to have a marble statue of an angel over her grave. How much will it cost — a marble statue of an angel?'

'Don't think about such things. We'll go into it all later, and you can have anything you like. You ought to go to sleep now. I want to finish my story tonight. Please keep quiet, not only for my sake but for your own, and go to sleep.'

He had almost exhausted what he wanted to say to her, but his words had no effect. She was still absorbed in the workings of her imagination. 'Yes', she kept on saying. 'As soon as I am well, I'll see to it. I'll build her a beautiful tomb, all of

white stone. And I'll plant flowers—roses, pinks and violets. Violets, because they are so strange. In the moonlight the tomb will look so beautiful. I wonder what day it is today. . . Oh yes, it's the twenty-first of September. There is still moonlight. Why did you turn on the light so early? Please switch it off and pull up the window screen. I am longing so much to see the moonlight.'

He was at his wit's end. Almost in a rage, he returned to his desk and said in a loud voice: 'Don't think about these things! Go to sleep, please. I have to write my story. If I don't finish it tonight I don't know how we can go on living next week. Do, please, realize that I am being serious!'

'Never mind, dear, please switch off the light for a moment. I want to see the moonlight—a crescent moon, and it is waning. Just for a moment, and then I'll go to sleep quietly. I implore you to do this, and I am sure it won't affect your work.'

He rose, turned off the electric light and pulled up the screen. He even opened the window to let in some fresh air and then threw himself into a big armchair. The small room was soon flooded in the faint light of a waning moon in late autumn.

After a while he felt chilly. He closed the window, pulled down the screen and switched on the light again. Stealthily he went to the bedside. She was already asleep. Her face looked healthy, and she was smiling as though she were still enjoying the moonlight. It seemed to him, as he gazed at her, that she was still thinking of the meadow, of herself sitting on the rock with one foot slightly lifted while he put on her shoes. And then, too, it seemed to him that she was taking a ride in a cab which was so much like a cradle, or else she was pointing with her fingers in the air and describing the fantastical tomb she wanted for Little Ts'ai. With a gentle sigh he pulled the cotton-padded coverlet over her shoulders.

LAO SHÊ
THE LAST TRAIN

THE train started a long while ago, and now the wheels rumbled mournfully along the rails, the passengers sighed and counted the hours seven o'clock, eight, nine, ten—by ten o'clock the train would arrive, and they would be home around midnight. It might not be too late, for the children might already be put to bed. It was New Year's Day, and they were all in a hurry to get home. They looked at the cans, the fruit and the toys heaped up on the shelves, and already they could hear the children crying 'Papa, papa!', and thinking of all this, they lost themselves in their thoughts, but there were others who were well aware that they would not be home before daybreak. They studied their fellow passengers, and to their consternation they discovered that there was not a single soul with whom they could claim the faintest acquaintance. When they reached home it would already be the New Year! And there were others who cursed the train, because it was moving only at a snail's pace, and though they remained physically in the carriage, smoking, sipping tea, yawning, pressing their noses to the window-glass and seeing there only an unfathomable abyss of darkness outside, they were really not in the carriage at all—they had been home and returned a hundred times since the train left the station. And now they lowered their heads and yawned to conceal the tears in their eyes.

There were not many passengers in the second-class carriage. There was fat Mr. Chang and thin Mr. Chiao, and they sat in the same compartment opposite one another. Whenever they got up, they spread their blankets over their seats to show that intruders would not be welcomed. When the train started they found to their surprise that there were

very few passengers indeed, and somehow this led them more than ever to feel grieved at the thought that they were travelling in a train on Christmas New Year Day. There were other similarities between the two passengers: they were both holding free passes, and both of them had been unable to obtain the pass until the previous day, and they therefore agreed that a man who could give free passes at his will had a perfect right to annoy bona fide travellers by keeping them to the last moment. They were both indignant at this treatment, for in the good old days friends were made of sterner stuff, and so they shook their heads and put the blame on these so-called friends who had prevented them from reaching their homes before the New Year's Day.

Old Mr. Chang removed his fox-fur coat and tucked his legs under his body, but he discovered that the seat was too narrow for sitting comfortably in this posture. Meanwhile, the temperature of the carriage rose and beads of perspiration began to roll down his brow. 'Boy, towels!' he shouted, and then to Mr. Chiao he said 'I wonder why they turn so much heat on nowadays'. He gasped 'It wouldn't be so hot if we were travelling on an aeroplane'.

Old Mr. Chiao had taken off his coat a long while ago, and now he was wearing a robe lined with white sheep's fur, and over that a sleeveless jacket of shining black satin. He showed no sign of feeling faint. He said 'One can get a free pass on an aeroplane, too. It isn't difficult'. And he drawled off with a faint smile.

'It's better not to risk travelling by air', Old Mr. Chang said, trying hard to keep his crossed legs under him, but succeeding only with great difficulty. 'Boy, towels!'

The 'boy' was over forty, and his neck was as thin as a stick, so thin that one imagined that it was quite easy to pluck off his head and plant it back again. You could see him

hurryng backwards and forwards along the passageway, his hands full of steaming towels. He was always eager to serve, but really—the way the management made you work on such a sacred day—it was really inconceivable. When he reached the compartment in front, he found Little Tsui and vented his injured feelings on him. 'Listen to this! I was on duty on the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth, and I counted on having today free. Well, at the last moment Mr Liu comes to me and says, "Look here, you'll have to have a run on New Year's Day"—that's what he says. There are sixty boys working on this line, and they have to pick on me. I don't care a damn about New Year's Day, but it's lousy all the same!' And saying this, he craned his neck in the direction of fat Mr Chang, but he remained exactly where he was, and untwining the twisted towels, he offered one of them to Little Tsui. 'Have one', he said, and went on with his complaint. 'I told Mr Liu that I didn't care about New Year's Day, but he must understand that it was my turn to be off duty that evening. I said I had been working the whole year and ought to have a day off.' He gulped something down his throat, and his Adam's apple floated up like the bubbles in water when a bottle is suddenly turned upside-down. He was so choked that he could not speak for a few moments. 'I'm fed up with it all—everything's all wrong nowadays.'

From the pale yellow face of Little Tsui something like a smile flowered out. He wanted to incline his head a little to demonstrate his sympathy, but for some reason he found himself unable to do this. He had his own difficulties. Everyone on the railway knew him—even the stationmasters and the mechanics. They were all his friends. His pale yellow face was equivalent to a second-class ticket. The Ministry of Transport itself would not dare to dispute its validity. And

everyone knew that he always travelled with one or two hundred ounces of opium in his luggage, and everyone admitted that he was entitled to do this. At the same time Little Tsui was careful never to intimidate anybody, nor to be partial in the distribution of his favours, for fear of arousing people's jealousy, and he understood their sorrows perfectly well and wished to show his sympathy. Because he offended no one, he was afraid of no one, and this, the supreme wisdom of life, could be read on his ticket—or rather, on his face.

'We're all so busy', he complained, hoping in some way that a recital of his troubles would benefit the 'boy'. And he went on to say that he had had to take this trip entirely against his will, he would have much preferred to remain comfortably at home, but on the very next day he would have to meet a blood-sucking girl who would take all his money away. He smiled, showing darkened teeth, and puffing out his cheeks he spat on the floor.

What he had said began to tell on the 'boy', who seemed to be forgetting his own sorrows and nodding appreciatively. The towels in his hand had grown cold and he returned to his cabin to re-soak them in water. When he emerged, he passed Little Tsui without saying a word and without looking at him, closing his eyes languidly as though to show that he had not forgotten the injuries done to him in spite of Little Tsui's consolations. Taking advantage of the locking movement of the train, he swung his body towards a certain Mr. K'ou. 'Like a towel, sir? It's trying to travel at this time of the year.' He would have liked to vent his feelings on a new audience, but since he did not know Mr. K'ou very well, he went about it in as circuitous a manner as possible.

Mr. K'ou was dressed with considerable éclat. He wore a dark serge overcoat with a beaver collar, with a brand new black satin, melon-shaped hat. He had removed neither his

coat nor his hat, and he sat there as rigid as a chairman on a platform waiting solemnly for the moment when he would address a huge audience. He took the towel, stretching out his arm at full length, and taking care not to fold his elbow he described a semi-circle with the towel until it reached his face. Then he rubbed his face fastidiously and ostentatiously. When his face emerged from the whirling cloud of the towel it dazzled and lent to his person a renewed splendour and dignity. He nodded to the 'boy', without explaining why he was travelling on New Year's Day.

'It's a bad thing—being a waiter', the 'boy' said, reluctant to let Mr K'ou go as easily as that. He knew that it would be inadvisable to repeat what he had said to Little Tsui. It would be necessary to talk with measured deliberation in order to seem both reverent and intimate. 'People ought to rest on New Year's Day,' he continued, 'but there is no rest for us. We can do nothing.' And taking back the used towel, 'Another one, sir?'

Mr K'ou shook his head. It was now clear that he was almost touched by the 'boy's' misfortunes, but would rather not enter into any conversation. Everyone on the line knew that he was a friend of the manager, and it was his privilege to enjoy a free ride in a second-class carriage any time he pleased. He had only to show his identity, and he could do this by not entering into desultory conversations with a waiter.

And meanwhile the waiter was at a loss to understand why Mr. K'ou had been shaking his head, but he could do nothing, for he knew perfectly well that the man was a friend of the manager. The carriage began to rock again, and the movement of the carriage hurled him into the passage way. Steadying himself, he untwisted a towel and holding it delicately by two corners he offered it to Mr Chang. 'Would you like one, sir?', and the man reached out for it, his

thick palm touching the central part of it, which was the hottest. He pressed it to his face, rubbing hard as though he were cleaning a mirror. Then he handed another one to Mr. Chiao, who showed no enthusiasm, but took the towel and with it proceeded to clean his nostrils and fingernails delicately. When he returned it to the waiter, it was all greasy and black.

'The inspectors will soon be coming now', he began, believing that no policy could be worse than that which introduced a conversation with a recital of his own troubles. He decided upon a flank attack. 'When they have gone, you will want to have a rest, and if any of you gentlemen would like a cushion, just let me know.' And he went on a little later. 'There are not many passengers on board, and you'll all be able to have a nap. It's a pity you gentlemen are spending a day like this on a train, but as for us waiters—' He sighed. He realized that he had been talking too much. He should have discovered in which way the wind was blowing. And he handed Mr. Chang another towel. Mr. Chang found that his toilet was taking up too much of his time, but remembered that he had not wiped his hair, which had only recently been cut. Although it was just as hard, or even harder, to rub his scalp, he determined that he would go through with the ordeal, and when he had finished he sighed with relief. However, Mr. Chiao declined a second offer, and gently picked his teeth with his now-clean fingernails.

'What's wrong with the heating system?' Mr. Chang asked, as he tossed back the towel.

'I wouldn't advise you to open the window', the waiter answered. 'Nine to ten you'll catch cold. The railway is under a rotten management.' The chance lay wide open for him, and he entered quickly. 'They make you work all the year round, and don't even let you rest on New Year's Day. Well, all talking is vain.'

And so it was, for the train had drawn into a small wayside station

From the third-class carriages a few passengers stepped down with their bags and baskets, and hurried towards the exit. Some of them stopped and hesitated, as though they were wondering whether they had left anything on the train. Those who remained in the train pressed their noses on the window-pane and looked out, their faces wearing an expression of envy and anxiety. No one in the second-class left the train, but half a dozen soldiers came into the compartment. Their boots thundered on the floor, their leather belts flashed in the light and their luggage consisted of four large cases of fireworks wrapped in scarlet paper and decorated with characters cut out of gold paper. The boxes were so large that for a long time they were undecided what to do with them. Meanwhile, boots crackled, men bustled about, their voices grew louder, and the question where to place the pile of fireworks remained for a long time unsettled. Finally, a man who resembled a battalion commander, said that they should be put on the floor. The platoon commander repeated the order, and then all the men bent double and executed the order, afterwards they rose stiffly and clicked their heels. The battalion commander returned the salute and ordered them to dismiss. Boots thundered. A cloud of grey caps, grey uniforms and grey leggings. A moment later someone said: 'Hurry!', and they obediently disappeared. A whistle sounded from the train, rather muffled. Lights and shadows flitted about, and the wheels began to rumble and the train to roll out of the station.

The waiter walked from one end of the carriage to the other, looking as though there was something on his mind. He stole a glance at the two soldiers and then at the heap of fireworks which lay so uncompromisingly on the floor, barring

his way, but he dare not say anything. He went into a desultory conversation with Little Tsui, harping on the old theme, repeating what he had said a moment before, but adding a more detailed and to him more satisfactory account of his misfortunes. Little Tsui began to talk about his girl friends.

But the waiter was still perturbed by the presence of the fireworks. He left Little Tsui, and resumed his furtive strolling among the compartments. The battalion commander was lying down, tired out, his pistol on the little table at the side of the carriage. The platoon commander had not yet dared to imitate him, but he had removed his cap and was now violently scratching his scalp. The waiter took care not to awaken the senior officer, but he smiled voluminously at the junior. 'What was I going to say?' he said in a half-apologetic tone of voice, hesitantly. 'Oh yes, I was going to suggest that it might be a better idea to put the crackers up on the shelf.'

'Why?' the officer answered, mouth awry with head scratching.

'You know, I was afraid people might step on them', the waiter replied, his head shrinking tortoise-fashion into his shoulders.

'No one would dare to touch them! Why should they touch them?' the officer answered, his little beady eyes askew.

'That's quite all right!' The waiter was all smiles, and his face became smaller as though under the weight of an enormous invisible rock. 'It doesn't matter at all. May I know where you are travelling to?'

'If I have any more trouble from you, what about fighting it out?' the officer suddenly shouted. He had been worn thin by the ill-humour of his senior officer, and he was perfectly prepared to fight.

But the waiter was in no need of a fight, and he abruptly disappeared. As he passed Mr. Chang, he said. 'The inspectors will be here soon, sir'.

Mr. Chang and Mr. Chiao were developing a cordial friendship. The ticket inspection began. There were two inspectors followed by three other men. The first wore a cap with gold braid, was white-skinned, stern, his nose in the air. The second also wore a cap with gold braid, but he was dwarfish, dark, and his face was full of smiles and somehow possessed the power of reconciling all those who were put out by the sternness of the first. As they went through the third-class carriages they pulled long faces, but when they went into the second-class the dwarf inspector was wreathed with smiles, and when they reached the first-class carriages they would both be smiling broadly. The third man was a giant from Tientsin, with a pistol and many rounds of ammunition in his belt. The fourth was a giant from Shantung, and he too carried a belt and a pistol, but he also wore a long sword. And the fifth was the waiter, whose head troubled him—for it was always popping upward and he found the greatest difficulty in maintaining it in its proper position.

The group came to a pause opposite Little Tsui. They all knew him, his pale yellow face and dark teeth, which immediately formed into a smile as between familiar acquaintances. It was an awkward moment. The first inspector gazed blankly into the distance as though absorbed in meditation, he kept on tapping his ticket-punch gently against his thigh. The second nodded recognition to Little Tsui. The Tientsin giant smiled at him, and immediately afterwards turned off the smile exactly as though he had pressed a switch. The Shantung giant touched the peak of his cap with his hand, and his eloquent eyes seemed to be saying. 'I've got a long story to tell you, but wait until all this nonsense is finished'.

The waiter felt that the inspection had lasted long enough, and as the group moved on he said 'Please sit down. There aren't many passengers—it will be all over in a moment, and then I'll come back to you.' Little Tsui found himself alone, a shadow flitting across his brow. At last he sat down.

The waiter caught them up a little later, but he did not join in their procession. He slipped up to Mr K'ou. 'Mr K'ou, sir,' he said, but the procession leader was slightly irritated by his interference, and giving his hand to Mr K'ou he said 'How is the manager these days? You know it's late in the year to start on a long journey'. Mr K'ou, his respectability unimpaired and even increased by this encounter, smiled weakly, murmured inaudibly, bowed and smiled again. The two guards stood bolt upright, quite still, feeling that they were outsiders in whatever game was now being employed. Their low positions in life denied them the privilege of entering into the conversation, but they contrived to maintain their dignity by puffing out their chests and standing at attention.

Meanwhile the waiter was taking this opportunity to inform Mr. Chang and Mr. Chiao to get their tickets ready. They gave him their tickets. He was awestruck when he realized that the tickets were free passes, and his reverence for the two gentlemen became even greater than before. He returned Mr. Chang's pass at once, but he ventured to detain Mr. Chiao's for a moment because it was clearly indicated on the pass that the holder was a woman, and there was indisputable evidence that Mr. Chiao was a man. The two inspectors drew apart and began to whisper into each other's ear. A moment later they nodded to one another, and it was clear that they had reached a common understanding that on New Year's Day a man might pass for a woman. The waiter returned Mr. Chiao's ticket with both hands, apologetically.

The battalion commander was now snoring. As soon as he noticed the arrival of the inspectors, the platoon commander put his legs up on the seat and showed every sign of an unwillingness to be disturbed. The inspectors' attention was immediately arrested by the pile of fireworks which littered the passageway. The Shantung giant nodded in admiration, overcome by the length and the solidity of the fireworks. And they passed through the compartment, and it was not until the first inspector reached the door that he turned to the waiter and said 'You'd better tell them to put the fireworks on the shelves', and in order to save the waiter from further embarrassment the second inspector added quickly 'Better still if you did it for them'. The waiter nodded his thin neck like a pendulum without saying anything, but all the while he was asking himself 'You haven't the courage to tell them—that's what it is—so what can I do except nod my head?—and besides, there is a great difference between nodding and doing'. The truth dawned on his mind. The fireworks must *not* be moved.

When he returned to Little Tsui, he was surprised to find the little fellow sunk in misery and knew at once that he was in need of a cup of water. Without saying anything he brought along the kettle. Little Tsui took something from his pocket—the waiter did not see it, but dimly suspected that it was opium—and pressed it into his left palm with the ball of his thumb, grinning, his face so pale that it resembled paper. He was almost perspiring and something like a faint vapour was rising from his face, which was glazed like an onion in a hothouse. Then he covered his mouth with his cupped hand, and the fingers began to wave in gentle undulations. He closed his eyes, took a sip from the cup and puffed out his cheeks. Afterwards his eyes opened, and an indubitable smile floated over his pale yellow face.

'It's more important than food', Little Tsui said wonderingly

'Oh yes, far more important,' the waiter nodded

Go-home-go-home-go-home-go-home The wheels roared in chorus. But they were very slow. The star-strewn sky undulated. Hills, trees, villages, graves, flashed past in clusters. The train dashed on and on in the darkness. Smoke, soot and sparks shot up furiously, and then disappeared. The train ran on, flying breathlessly, one patch of darkness following on another. A stretch of snow and a string of low mounds glowed and darkened and were gone. Go-home-go-home-go-home. The lights were ablaze, the temperature streaming, all the passengers were weary to death, and not one was inclined to sleep. Go-home-go-home-go-home. The farewell rites to the Old Year, the libations to the gods, the offerings to the Ancestors, the writing on the spring scrolls, the fire-crackers, the dumplings, the sweetmeats, the dinners and the wine—all these became suddenly very real to them, filling their eyes and their ears, their palates and their nostrils. A smile would light upon their lips and instantly disappear, dying away at the recollection that they were still physically in the train. Go-home-go-home-go-home-go-home. Darkness, darkness, darkness. The starry sky undulated. Patches of snowy ground rose and fell. No human sounds, no traffic, nothing visible. Darkness endlessly receding, an interminable road tightly hugging the brightly lit train which struggled furiously to tear itself away from the menace of the surrounding darkness. And yet the darkness never forsook the train. Go-home-go-home-go-home . . .

Mr. Chang took down from the shelf two bottles of distilled wine, and said to Mr. Chiao 'We're just like old friends now. How about a drop of this? We might as well enjoy New Year's Day—no reason why we shouldn't enjoy

ourselves'. He handed over a cup of the wine 'Real Yinkow¹ wine Twenty years old You can't get it on the market Bottoms up'

Mr Chiao was too polite to refuse. He asked himself what he should offer Mr Chang in return, and all the time he kept his eyes fixed on the cup, and his hands were fidgeting. He reached up to the shelf, took down a large parcel, gently unwrapped it and revealed a number of smaller parcels. He pinched them one by one, and finally removed the three parcels which he felt sure contained dried lichees, preserved dates and spiced bean-curd. He then unwrapped them and offered them to Mr Chang. 'We're like old friends. Don't stand on any ceremony'

Mr. Chang picked a lichee, which burst under the pressure of his fingers. The sound amused him. It was an appropriate sound, reminiscent of New Year's Day. He watched Mr. Chiao sipping the wine and, waiting till his friend had swallowed it all, he asked. 'Well, how do you like the stuff?'

'Marvellous!' Mr. Chiao wetted his lips. 'Marvellous! Nothing like it anywhere.'

They filled up one another's cups, and slowly and imperceptibly their faces turned crimson. Their tongues were unloosened. They talked of their families, their jobs, their friends, the difficulty of earning money, free passes. Their cups clinked, their hearts clinked, their eyes moistened, they were permeated with warmth. It was time for one of them to be generous. Mr. Chiao unwrapped another parcel which contained preserved oranges. Mr. Chang looked at the two remaining bottles and said 'Well, we'll have to finish them. One each. Mustn't leave a drop. We're old friends now. Come on Bottoms up!'

'I'm not very good at drinking.'

¹ A place between Mukden and Port Arthur

'Nonsense. Twenty years old Mellow. Won't make you drunk. It's God's will that we should become friends. Drink up!'

Mr Chiao was profoundly honoured. Mr. Chang looked at his bottle—there was not very much left now. He untied his collar. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, his eyes were bloodshot and his tongue was stiff. Though still talkative, his talk was reduced to mere babbling, he had not yet completely lost his self-control, he could still put a curb on the curious inner urge which nearly led him to curse in front of his new-found friend, and the resultant of these forces took the form, not of a quarrel, or incivility, but rather of exultation and gaiety. Mr Chiao, on the other hand, had been able to stomach only half of the bottle assigned to him, but his face was already turning deathly pale. He produced a packet of cigarettes and threw one at Mr Chang. Both lit their cigarettes. Cigarette in mouth, Mr. Chang reclined along the seat, his legs dangling nonchalantly. He itched to sing, but his throat was scorched and hoarse, and he breathed heavily through his nose like an angry bull. Mr. Chiao also leaned back, cigarette in hand, his eyes fixed on the legs of the seat opposite him, his heart beating wildly. He hiccupped. His face was pale, and he felt a faint itching all over his body.

Go-home-go-home-go-home-go-home. In Mr Chang's ears the wheels sounded as though they were going at break-neck speed. His heart beat fast, and suddenly everything began buzzing. His head turned round and round in the air, buzzing like a fly. All objects were dancing and glowing in red circles. When the buzzing ceased, his heart once more began to beat at its accustomed ritual, and he opened his eyes slightly, partially regaining his strength. He pretended that nothing had happened, and groping for the matchbox he relit his extinguished cigarette. Then he threw the match away.

Suddenly on the table a greenish flame flared up, smelling of alcohol, spinning among the cups and bottles, fluttering, rising, spreading out. Mr Chiao was startled out of his dreams as the cigarette which he held in his hand suddenly caught fire. He threw it away. He beat the table with both hands to extinguish the fire, and in doing this he knocked down the cups and bottles. Iridescent tongues licked the unopened parcels. Mr Chang's face was hidden in flames. Mr. Chiao thought of running away. The flames on the table soared up, and the parcels on the shelf above seemed to reach down to catch the rising columns of flames. Flame linked with flame. Mr Chiao himself was ablaze. The fire reached his eyebrows, charring them, snapping at his hair, which sizzled, lighting up the alcohol on his lips and turning him into a fire-breathing monster.

Suddenly pop, pop, pop. It sounded like machine-gun fire. The platoon commander had hardly opened his eyes when a cracker exploded on his nose and sent sparks and blood flying in fine sprays. He rose, and began frantically running. There were explosions everywhere, under his feet, all round his body. The noise was deafening as though they had stepped on a land mine. The battalion commander was swallowed up in the fire before he could open his eyes. He was trying to open his eyes when the right eye received a direct hit from one of the exploding crackers.

Mr. K'ou started up. He cast a quick glance at his luggage on the shelf. Some of the parcels were already burning, and the fire was closing in from all sides—from above, from below, and even from a long way away. Flames licked at him, and an idea flashed through his mind. He picked up one of his shoes from the floor and smote at the windowpane. He wanted to jump out of the window. The glass was broken, a gale rushed in, the fire turned wild. His collar of beaver-skin, the four

bedrolls, the five boxes, his clothes—they were all swallowed up in the flames. The train ran on, the wind was roaring, the firecrackers kept going off. Mr K'ou ran like a wild animal.

Little Tsui was a seasoned traveller. He had heard the sounds, but he was too lazy to open his eyes. The fire finally reached his feet and spread along his body. He felt hot, and sat up. He saw nothing but smoke and fire. The crackers continued to explode, the opium which he carried on his body began to melt and burn. The delicious smell assailed his nostrils. He felt a scorching heat. His legs could not move. The fire spread over his chest. His huddled body was wrapped in flames, a gigantic bubbling ball of opium-paste, until it was reduced to the shape of a cocoon.

So Little Tsui stirred no more. Mr Chang was dead-drunk, and he lay there like a log. Mr Chiao, Mr K'ou and the platoon commander were running about in all directions, stark staring mad. The battalion commander knelt on the bench and wailed. The fire had already penetrated every corner of the carriage, the smell of sulphur was suffocating. The crackers were no longer exploding—they had all been burnt. The noise died away, but the smoke grew thicker. And at last those who were running about no longer ran about, and those who were wailing no longer wailed. The fire began to devour the furniture. The train kept darting forward, the wind kept roaring. Red tongues of flame struggled within the dense clouds of smoke, hoping for an outlet. The smoke turned milky, and the flames began to thrash at the windows. The whole carriage was transparent with light, and tongues of fire streamed away like streamers, a thousand torches burning brightly in the wind.

The train slowed down as it drew near a small station, but it did not stop. The trackman turned the lever and said to himself. 'Fire!' The signalman flashed his green lamp and

said to himself. 'Fire!' The guards stood at attention and said to themselves. 'Fire!' The stationmaster was late in arriving, and when he arrived the train had already left, but he saw dimly in his half-drunken stupor that there was a train on fire, and preferred to believe that it was an hallucination. The signalman blew out his lamp, the trackman shifted the lever back by which the rails resumed their normal position, the guards returned with their rifles to their recreation quarters, and each of them retained in his mind a picture of the fire, and yet not one of them was inclined to admit that he had seen it. Gradually the idea of the fire died away in their minds, and they were concerned only about how they could enjoy the festival. They lit firecrackers, drank, played mahjong. Everything was right with the world.

As the train left the station, it gained speed. The wind howled, and the fire crackled. Brilliant rockets shot out in sprays. The night was dark and the train was a chain of lanterns pouring out licking flames. Of the second-class carriage, only a charred skeleton remained. The flames, having nothing to feed on, moved backwards and forwards, and finally entered the third-class carriage. Smoke came first, sending out a pungent, and slightly sweet smell of charred flesh and furniture. Fire followed. 'Fire! Fire! Fire!' Everyone was shouting in fearful panic. They lost their heads. They broke the windows in an attempt to leap out, and then hesitated. Some began to run, and then they would fall against one another and fall down. Some sat transfixed to their seats, unable even to cry. Turbulence. Panic. Every effort proved vain. They howled, folded their arms round their heads, beat off the flames with their clothes, ran, jumped out of the carriage . . .

The fire had discovered a new colony, with rich resources and a great population. It was mad with joy. It licked out

with one of its tongues, pawed with another, hid a third in the smoke, and suddenly thrust a fourth through the window. A fifth wandered without any fixed goal. It was the sixth which joined all the others together. Hundreds of flames began dancing in the most fantastic patterns. They rolled themselves up into balls, shot out like meteors, gathered in red-and-green pools of fire. They glowed, dwindled, crept in the wake of the smoke, and then disappeared. Then they burst out of the smoke in torrents. They squeaked and gibbered as they burned human flesh and broiled human hair. The crowd howled, the wind roared, the fire crackled. The whole car was on fire. The smoke was heavy. It was a lovely cremation.

The train arrived at the next station, where it was due to stop. It stopped. Signalmen, ticket-inspectors, guards, the stationmaster and the assistant stationmaster, the clerks and the hangers-on all looked at the burning carriages in amazement, and could do nothing, because there were no fire engines and no implements for putting out fires. The second-class carriage, and the two adjacent third-class carriages in front and behind were silent and still. From them a plume of blue smoke curled up—languidly and leisurely.

It was reported later that fifty-two corpses were found on the train, and the bodies of eleven more, who had jumped off and killed themselves, were found along the line.

After the Lantern Festival—that is, fifteen days after the New Year—an inspector arrived. For the first three days he attended official receptions, and had little time to spare for the investigation. The next three days were spent in looking after some personal affairs which could no longer be laid aside. Then the investigation began.

The guard knew nothing. The first inspector knew nothing. The second inspector knew nothing. Neither the

Tientsin giant, nor the Shantung giant, nor the waiter, knew anything about the cause of the fire. Reports from the various stations on the number of tickets sold tallied closely with the number of tickets collected, taking into account the sixty-three tickets which were missing. These corresponded exactly with the number of casualties and so must have been burnt. No station reported the sale of second-class tickets, it followed that the second class must have been empty, and therefore the fire could not have started in the second-class carriage.

Finally, the waiter was re-examined. He declared that he knew nothing about the fire, which must have started when he was in the dining-car. The tribunal decided that he was irrevocably wrong, and should be punished for having left his post of duty. And he was duly discharged from the service.

The inspector submitted his report with a detailed account of the tragedy written in the most admirable style.

'I don't care at all', the waiter said to his wife. 'They put you on duty on New Year's Day, and then, when everything goes wrong, they think we will be starved if we leave their wretched railway.'

'What nonsense!' his wife answered. 'I'm not worried about that. What I am worried about is the cabbage that got burnt.'

SHEN TS'UNG WEN

THE LAMP

Two years ago, when I was teaching at college, I took my present lodging, where I use the front room as my study and the inner room as my bedroom. It was May. Curiously enough, the electric light was always going out. Towards evening, while my ricebowl and chopsticks were set ready on the table, I would glance contentedly at those dishes which were always tasteful to me, though simple in appearance, and I would think of paying a sincere tribute to my cook. Then the lights would go out, and I would have to postpone my supper indefinitely. Sometimes after supper, when I was comfortably seated and reading some book or other, or a visitor had called to consult me on various matters, then again the light would go out. More than once a friend of mine and I would be deciphering an unannotated piece of ancient Chinese calligraphy in cursive script, or pondering the genuineness of some antiquated seals, when an unexpected darkness compelled us to stop our work, sighing. My friend, himself a painter and calligraphist, usually the gentlest of men, could not suppress his anger, and he would curse the electric light company for their irresponsibility.

These mishaps did not improve for about a fortnight. Inquiries and complaints were sent in from various quarters, but the electric light company merely published an apology in the newspapers, saying that the defect was due entirely to a change of weather. Meanwhile, the price of candles went up by five cents a packet, as I learnt from my cook, who never forgot to remind me of the nuisance, placing a candle beside my plate when he brought in my supper.

My cook was an extraordinary man—honest and perfectly trustworthy. When quite young, he had been among my

father's retinue, travelling in the north-west and north-east, penetrating as far as Mongolia and Szechuan. Once he even went alone to Kwangsi and Yunnan. For several years he remained in my native town, watching dutifully over my grandfather's tomb. Last year he served in the Southern revolutionary expedition in their advance towards Shangtung. He was chief cook under the company commander of the 71st Regiment. In Tsinanfu, he witnessed the most shocking atrocities committed by the hostile armies upon the civilians, and, one night, amidst the spluttering of machine-guns, he left his regiment, losing all his personal possessions. Soon he found his way back to Nanking. Perhaps it was from an acquaintance that he learnt my address, for he immediately wrote to me. He would be pleased, he wrote, if I would allow him to superintend my household. In reply, I told him that it might be a good idea for him to have a holiday in Shanghai, but to undertake my housework seemed out of question, as I lived a very simple life. Besides, I would try to entertain him and help him out of his financial and other difficulties until the time came when he would return. At last he arrived. He wore a grey uniform which looked so worn, and so tight, that I imagined that it had been tailored in Hunan three years ago, when the National Revolutionary Army marched through the province. His stout, bulky figure was framed in an army uniform entirely unsuited to him. He brought with him a small bag, a hot-water bottle, a toothbrush, and a pair of maple chopsticks. The hot-water bottle hung at his waist, the toothbrush stuck out of his left upper pocket, and the chopsticks were fastened across the bag according to the custom in the army. The ideal servant, for whom I had been searching day and night, stood before me. Fastidious as I was, I could find nothing disagreeable in him.

Without the exchange of a single word between us, I was conscious of the simplicity and nobility of his heart.

We found a great number of things to talk about. Our topics ranged from my grandfather to the mysterious grandson, whom my father would delight in imagining, but whose existence was still problematical. This servant of mine poured out an uninterrupted flow of conversation. He was never wearied of discussing my family affairs, nor were his own personal experiences ever exhausted. Imagine him—a man of about fifty, who had travelled nearly always on foot over the greater part of China, had witnessed the turmoil following the Boxer rebellion, and the overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty, had fought many battles in the civil wars, had tasted a great variety of foods, and had entrusted himself to many strange beds, had climbed over high mountains and swum torrential rivers. He was a classic, a masterpiece which one could never finish reading. And, as I listened to him, my profound interest and keen curiosity were intensified. Whenever I had a moment to spare, I would ask him about whatever was uppermost in my mind, and I was never disappointed.

My landlady's maid would charge me sixteen dollars a month for my board, two meals a day. She was a shrewd woman from a village north of the Yangtse river. I enjoyed whatever she could spare of broad beans and cuttlefish served alternately, and there was scarcely anything else. Occasionally she would give me some pork, a little sweetened, or fish, not fried but steamed in the rice kettle and seasoned with soy-bean sauce. As a guest, the newcomer remained silent as he regarded my meals for two days. On the third day, however, he was out of patience, and asked for money. I gave him ten dollars, without in the least knowing what he was going to do with it. But that afternoon he returned secretly with the cooking utensils, and it was not till supper-time that he

appeared, wearing his old soldier's uniform, bringing in the ricebowls, and smiling as he explained that the dishes were prepared with his own hands, adding that they would probably improve if he were allowed to carry on. The simplicity of his carriage, and the appetizing flavour of the dishes, filled me with reminiscences of army life, and throughout the meal we talked of nothing except the rank and file. After supper, he cleared the table and went to the kitchen. Left alone, I sat at my desk, reading in candlelight the exercises sent in by my students. Suddenly the door opened, and the old soldier slipped in. I suspect that in the faintly lit room I may have possessed some of the dignity of a company commander. The retired sergeant-major announced himself and hung at the door. 'What is it?' I said. He came towards me, bearing in his hand a piece of paper in which he had written an account of the day's expenditure. I realized that he had come to settle the account. I felt embarrassed and a little annoyed. The serious expression on his face did, however, suggest that he was performing the duty of a cook, and I was soon reconciled to a smile. 'Why do you bother?' 'I think it is better to make things clear. If we cook by ourselves, you know, we'll save a great deal of money—sixteen dollars a month would be more than enough for both of us. For cuttlefish and stale rice every day, you have to pay sixteen dollars!' 'Isn't it too much work for you?' 'Too much work! Why, cooking rice and vegetables is nothing compared to moving boulders out of the river-bed. You—you are a gentleman of leisure!' Another glance at his scrupulously honest face, and I could no longer raise any objections. And so I agreed to let him undertake the cooking of my meals.

The old soldier acclimatized himself readily to the new circumstances in Shanghai, but his old uniform still looked a little out of place. I suggested that I should find a tailor for

him, and asked him for his preferences in style and colour. He nodded, but made no answer. Shortly afterwards, learning that I had received an unexpected sum of money, he asked if I could spare him ten dollars, and that evening, with the ten dollars in his pocket, he went out and bought two suits of cotton flannel tailored after the manner of a Sun Yat-sen uniform, and a pair of secondhand shoes set with spurs. He showed me these things, with an air of pride and contentment. 'Well,' I said, 'what makes you so fond of that uniform? You are no longer in the army. Why don't you wear a long gown like me?' 'I am always a soldier, sir,' he replied. And so he is known among my friends as the 'army officer cook.'

At first, the trouble with the electric light was not serious. Occasionally it would go out for a short while. Later on, however, the matter became worse, and we never had supper without a candle. Then, one day, the soldier found an old lamp, trimmed the wick to the shape of a triangle, cleaned and polished it, and set it on my table. Such an old-fashioned lamp might well be considered a curio in Shanghai, but I said nothing, knowing his obstinacy. Besides, it was useful. And in case the electric light should go out, I placed the lamp on my desk when I began to work after supper. Facing the transparent crystal lampshade, and the faint yellowish glimmer which issued through it, often I would be immediately translated in the company of the soldier into the dream-laden, fantastic atmosphere of a dilapidated temple, or a small village inn—an inn situated in the neighbourhood of a whole battalion of soldiers and horses. I had loved these things, but they were now remote and out of my reach in Shanghai. At that time I was no longer able to suppress my scepticism and weariness over the details of my work. What was I doing? Every day I entered the lecture-hall, and there I stood by a small square table in front of an audience, looking serious and

dignified, and at the same time I felt hypocritical and conscience-stricken. I talked rubbish, but this rubbish was, nevertheless, supported by quotations from different, and sometimes contradictory, authorities. I would be hypnotized by my own arguments, and then, suddenly, the bell would ring and I would notice a student who had fallen asleep with his head in his arms. A crowd of students would gather round me, plying me with incessant, irrelevant questions, till at last I escaped to my own rooms, hoping to find peace there. But when I returned home, I found books, papers and manuscripts lying all over the place. I had to push them aside before I could find enough space on the desk to deposit the students' exercise books. Then I would heave a sigh of relief and quietly read through their exercises. Oh, I was tired of it all. I yearned to escape altogether from the world. I would rather take up the post of clerk in a meat-tax office and listen to the frogs croaking in the little pools in the courtyard after heavy rain, and set myself to imitating the style of our ancient authors.

But there in front of me lay the old-fashioned lamp, under whose flickering glimmer I caught a glimpse of the old soldier looking the acme of contentment. It was this soldier who could make me forget for a moment the day's toil and the troubled evening air. He instantly transformed himself into an object of devotion.

'Do you know any soldiers' songs?' I asked him.

'Of course', he replied. 'How can a soldier not know those songs? Only the songs of foreigners are strange to me.'

'And the folk-songs?' I continued.

'What kind of folk-songs?'

'Are there different kinds of folk-songs?' 'Cloud over cloud is climbing in the sky.' 'The sky is flooded by the billowing clouds.' Don't you know them? They are all

beautiful, and I did not understand them in my childhood. Then I joined a guerrilla detachment and we were so wild that we considered dog's meat the rarest delicacy, and these songs were never far from our lips. Not even the gods could have been happier than we were in those days.'

'They're prohibited among the regular troops now', he answered. 'You are punished if you even whistle them.'

'Then you must think me an outlaw?' The songs were like charms to me in my youth. I often wonder if they can still be heard among the young who "live in the mountains under a blue sky".'

'I am afraid the world has changed since those days', he said musingly. 'All good virtues and refined customs have been swept away by a mysterious whirlwind. Just look at this queer lamp. Last year, when I was living with your father in the country, all the lamps I came upon were like this.'

It was clear that he shared the preference of the country gentry for seed-oil lamps rather than gasoline.

We indulged in day-dreaming, we were both intoxicated. But, unfortunately, the landlady's clock in the corridor struck nine, and the old soldier immediately stood up and bade me goodnight. I entreated, and even threatened him to resume the conversation, but he did not hear me, went into my bedroom to have a last look round, and returned to salute me awkwardly and at the same time charmingly, as though we were still with soldiers in the camp. Then he hurried down to his own small bedroom.

'Why should he be in such a great hurry?' I asked myself. Perhaps he was afraid to interfere with my work, or perhaps again he feared to intrude on my proper bed-time. A moment before he had looked so eager, so brimful of stories he wanted to relate, and suddenly he had stopped, postponing till tomorrow the continuation of his stories. Nine o'clock was

the calm flow in his unspoken military testament. Left alone, I felt a profound loneliness creeping over the corners of my heart. Concentration was impossible, and every effort to resume my work proved to be futile.

I was bewildered before his inexhaustible resourcefulness. I thought of writing about him, but how could I transform his beautiful, pure soul into sedentary prose? Both his complexion and his voice had led me to see life under a different aspect, and I had to own that what I knew and wrote about was altogether too shallow and prosaic. A pair of sunken eyes, faintly melancholy, yet not entirely lacking hope in the future, bare of eyelashes, peeping out at you from under brownish eyelids. You read the ever-present eloquence in his eyes, but you failed to transpose these things into words. Sometimes I would gaze at him without uttering a word. Sometimes, when we were talking about the wars, he would pause abruptly and assume a pensive expression at the mention of the houses of the peasants burnt to the ground, and their cattle seized and led away in triumph. He seemed to be groping in the dark corners of his brain for words which possessed meaning, but all words seemed powerless now. He stared in silence. There was an understanding between us. Long afterwards, a gentle and perfectly charming smile crept over his face, and, with a nod of the head, our painful thoughts were turned into another direction altogether as he sang a short song. He never dreamed of the warring of my heart in those moments. There were times when his most casual gestures filled me with horror at the thought of my Chinese friends, who were so stupid and so righteous. There were times, indeed, when it seemed that the peaceful soul of this most ancient and oriental people was being driven by the tides of the present into an incongruous world of struggle and turmoil. With melancholy and restraint they lived out their

lives of compromise in a new world, while their dreams were still centred upon a world of light. Listening to him, I would suppress my tears with the greatest difficulty.

Sometimes, secretly agitated, I would grow irritable, and then I would ask him to entertain himself instead of waiting idly in my room. At such moments he would glance at me speechless and walk quietly away. Immediately afterwards I would call him back. 'Would you like to go to the theatre?' I would ask apologetically, giving him a few dollars, and adding that he might do as he pleased with them. He would stare at me with a forced smile, politely take the money, and then turn to walk downstairs. As usual, I worked till midnight before going to bed. I heard the old soldier softly opening the door before disappearing, at ten o'clock a faint squeak at the door announced his return. I hoped he had been enjoying himself at the play, or drinking wine, or gambling, and thinking that the money had been enough, I did not bother him with questions. At lunch the next day I was surprised to find a well-cooked chicken on the table, but I refrained from inquiring how it had come there. We smiled, and I could read in his brown eyes the vague and tender words he had left unspoken. 'Let us drink', I said. 'You used to drink a great deal, didn't you?' He hesitated, and answered, with a delightful smile. 'Oh, I have some good news for you. Nearly all the wine sellers here only sell alcohol. I tried many shops before I came to one belonging to a countryman of mine who offered me some really delicious rice wine'. He hurried downstairs and returned with a small bottle of white wine. He poured half a cup for me. 'Just drink this—not too much!' Though almost a teetotaler, I could only do my best to comply with his wishes. Then he filled the cup again, and emptied it in one throw. He relished its sweet and sour fragrance. Smiling and saying nothing, he took the bottle

downstairs. Next day we had another chicken. In Shanghai in those days a chicken cost only a dollar.

The old soldier never showed much enthusiasm in the college where I was working. Once he inquired about the future of the students after graduation, and seemed to feel that they were all becoming magistrates. He wanted to know, too, the amount of my salary, and if it fluctuated as it did in the army during civil wars. All he wanted to know was the potential number of magistrates, and whether my monthly salary was sufficient for my living expenditure. His interest was centred on me alone. Out of pure kindness he became increasingly inquisitive about my personal affairs. At first he would agree with me about everything. Later on, he would find excuses to intrude upon my time, and he no longer paid any attention to my reluctance, and seemed to be imposing upon himself all kinds of duties and obligations for my sake. I could not reproach him in a harsh voice, or drive him away by kicking him downstairs. He said very little, though sometimes he would complain against invisible and imaginary enemies, the suspected causes of the present unfair treatment of myself. His sense of justice could never be reconciled to the fact that a man of my age remained unmarried. Nevertheless, as time went on, I became more and more embarrassed by his endless talkativeness. Once I told him rather bluntly that being neither rich and respectable as a gentleman, nor young and promising as a student, I was helpless about the matter and had decided to give up any further attempts. I thought he would give up criticizing my negligence, but, on the contrary, everything became worse. He began to keep an eye on all my fair visitors. Whenever a lady friend or a girl student called, he would go out and buy fruit and bring it in on a neat tray. Then he would back out and stand silent on the landing or on the stairs, playing the vigilant eavesdropper.

And when I was seeing my visitor off, he was always there, pretending to be looking for something. He would cast a casual glance at her, and there would follow fitful inquiries about the visitor and the impressions I had formed of her, and he would even comment on her manneers, her way of smiling and speaking. More irrelevant was his queer application of the Chinese laws of physiognomy. By observation of the voice, features, figure and gait, he could tell whether the woman in question was to be fruitful or virtuous, to enjoy blessedness or a long old age. At first I paid little attention to the things simmering in his mind, but after a while I began to notice the extraordinary behaviour he evinced in the presence of myself and my fair visitors. It was curious. In his innocence and simplicity, he seemed to think he was dutifully fulfilling a solemn role when he attempted to induce me to marry a woman, and perhaps he was looking forward to the great moment when, wearing a smart uniform newly purchased from the market, he would stand gracefully at the entrance of the East Asia Hotel and receive the guests who had come to celebrate my wedding. And, perhaps, in exactly the same uniform, he would one day accompany my young son, dressed like the son of a general, to play and frolic in the park. He may have indulged in still more fantastic dreams. Some day, perhaps, I would return in honour and accompanied by my family to my native city, and he would come before me, riding a magnificent horse, the first to enter the city gates, returning the greetings of the relatives and friends who had come out to welcome me. Then he would spur the horse to a gallop, while the whole town rejoiced. Ten years before, he had cherished similar hopes for my father, and again later for my elder brother, but they were all frustrated. He seized upon me as a drowning man seizes upon a straw. In the old days my family was flourishing and renowned in the

neighbourhood. When it began to decline, I cannot exactly tell. According to the old soldier, my father, his master, returned home in despair after a series of adventures in Mongolia and the north-west. He had fought the mounted bandits and been injured, and there resulted the constant ache along his spine and sides, a disease which never left him and reduced him to a premature old age. He retained the rank of colonel, and even offered his services to the medical corps of my province. My elder brother followed in his footsteps. Eventually, as a result of his haphazard wandering, he acquired the rough manners and courage characteristic of the north-eastern provinces, and the noisiness and extravagance of the Shanghai tradespeople. He, too, returned home and practised as a professional artist. With my younger brother, a man whom the old soldier regretted that he had never met, things took a different turn, and a revolutionary age began. He entered Whampoa Military Academy in Canton. There was icy vigour and boiling-hot blood in this younger brother of mine. As a platoon commander, he led a few dozen soldiers and gallantly fought out some battles in Hupeh and Kiangsi, but as soon as the revolution of 1927 was over, he mysteriously left the army and returned to civilian life, bitterly lamenting the bloodshed and corruption, and all the inconceivable stupidities of humanity. Now he idled away his days as an honorary staff-officer of the lowest rank, with pay, but without any known duties. I did not follow in the path of my father or my brothers, and it was this, perhaps, that gave the old soldier grounds for his selfless dreams of my future.

Before the old soldier I was continually oppressed with melancholy and shame. And yet I dared not question his dreams. Once I told him quite frankly that I enjoyed being a teacher and writer, and wanted nothing more, but he could

see only the surface of my life and suspected great unplumbed depths

At that time there was a young girl, a revolutionist, who would occasionally call on me and stay for a long while. Usually, she brought along her own writings, and whatever the season, she would wear a blue gown. She had perfect confidence in me, and confided in me completely. For a while the old soldier's entire interest was centred upon her. He behaved like a mother, and nothing—however trivial—escaped his attention. When my lady friend came, he would always find some excuse to linger for a few minutes in my room with the clear desire of being introduced to her. I had no desire to hurt him. I even told my young friend about him, his rugged past, his honesty, his sincerity. And gradually she grew friendly with him. The weather-beaten old soldier, whose heart had been hardened by slaughter and famine, began to melt like wax, and by some mysterious process he came to the conclusion that I would be committing a terrible crime if I failed to be united with her in matrimony. And, in a serious and rather reproachful manner he would sometimes discuss the matter with me when we were alone. At first he was shy when she spoke to him, but later, when she began to ask him about his own past, he opened out, smiling an unnatural smile, and answering politely and yet with some lingering embarrassment. Before long, familiarity brought courage, and he would try to turn the main topic of discussion to my daily affairs. He implored her to advise me on my way of living, as, for example: I should work less, pay more attention to my food, dress like a gentleman. These conversations, of course, were conducted in my presence. He dwelt on the gentle and noble manners of my father, the great esteem of my countrymen for my brothers, the grace and sweetness of my mother. And all the time he was trying to

explain, in the most awkward manner imaginable, how a young woman should behave to her husband and her father-in-law. On points bordering on exaggeration, and while speaking in a subdued voice, he would smile upon me indulgently, lest I should be annoyed and make unnecessary corrections. As soon as he saw that the young lady was moved to sympathy, he imagined his solemn duty fulfilled, and, casting a contented glance at me, he would ask permission to go downstairs to prepare tea and refreshments. His quick steps on the stairs spoke of a light heart.

One day he saw me at my desk addressing a letter to my mother. His curiosity was intensely stimulated, and he asked if I had mentioned the young lady 'The extraordinary lady', he said, and I knew that he meant extraordinarily charming or extraordinarily suitable. I did not reply. I knit my brows. 'Hm, hm . . .' He backed away, grumbling. His eyes seemed to be saying 'Well—only a joke—out of pure good will, I assure you! Please don't mind!' He went towards the furthest corner of the room, as though dreading that I might throw the inkstone at his head.

One day the lady in the blue gown called while I was away. The old soldier received her, and for a while acted as her only interlocutor. (Afterwards, I realized from his gestures that he had treated her in a very polite and yet intimate manner as befits a servant before the mistress of a household.) At last, not knowing when I would return, she went away. As soon as I arrived, I had to listen to his report on her, and his interminable irrelevant digressions. And then, suddenly, she reappeared. It was nearly supper-time. Guessing that I was about to invite her to supper, he immediately showed his excitement and hurried downstairs. Half an hour later he brought in several surprisingly sumptuous dishes. I do not know where he learned his new style of cooking. Instead of

peppering, he made everything sweet to suit her taste—even the roast fish was seasoned with sugar and soui sauce.

When the table was cleared, he brought in the dessert—apples and a pot of boiling-hot tea. Though nothing more was wanted, he hovered around for a few minutes before going downstairs. And now, overwhelmed with excitement, he began to drink, and to his intoxicated eyes there was displayed a picture of his master and mistress, and in the depths of the cup he may even have seen the young boy, who was also his master, a boy dressed in a splendid army uniform exactly like the foreign children he would meet in the streets. And this visionary young master, with two small white legs in a brand-new pair of leather shoes, walked perfectly steadily and behind him there followed the faithful servant—himself! He had given way to the wildest dreams on learning that I was supping together with the young lady. But nothing could be more pathetic. My young lady friend had come to tell me that she and her sweetheart were leaving for Peking next month, and they would be married there. The word 'marriage' mysteriously reached the ears of the old soldier, ears as wonderfully keen as those of a battle-horse, and without knowing anything else, he confidently interpreted the word as the culmination of all his long-deferred hopes. After she had gone, I sat down at my desk, rejoicing over the happy news, and yet, unconsciously, I must have been a little depressed. Suddenly a reddish face protruded from under my nose, and I saw that he had been drinking.

'Well, you've had a drop too much, haven't you? How on earth did you manage to provide so many beautiful dishes? My guest appreciated your cooking tremendously.'

He had been smiling all the time, and now he was as frisky as a kitten. 'I feel very happy today', he said.

'You ought to be happy.'

He was in an unusual mood, and inclined to argue with me. 'What do you mean—I ought to? I can't see why. I've never been so happy. I emptied half a bottle of white wine.'

'Well, buy some more tomorrow', I said. 'Try always to have a bottle handy. Whatever happens, you should have enough to drink, in spite of the shortage of everything here.'

'I've never drunk so much in my life', he replied. 'I ought to be happy. Do I always look unhappy? When I think of your father and his bad luck, really I can't feel happy at all. And when I think of your elder brother and his delicate health . . . I've never seen your younger brother . . . He's a leopard, a golden-striped leopard, hot-tempered, but very agreeable. Once I thought I would follow him through the enemy's lines, with a gun in my hand, climbing barbed wire and things, challenging those rough northerners and sticking a bayonet in their chests . . . learning from him how to throw one of those hand-grenades which describe a hyperbola in seven seconds . . . But you know, I heard that all the fourth-class of the officers at Whampo were killed in the battle of Lungt'an. Two months ago someone came and told me you could still smell the bodies. Oh, there must have been a friendly star hanging over the head of third master. He would go out hunting the wild boar on horseback. A hero, isn't he? And I am unhappy because he was never promoted to divisional commander. You can't make me happy. You are not at all healthy. Why the hell don't you. . . .'

'Go to bed earlier? I have so much to do.'

'Yes, you don't trust me—that's it. You think I'm just a stranger. I've got the ears of an old horse. Nothing escapes me. I know everything. I'll soon be drinking in honour of the happy marriage. You are keeping the secret from me. All right, I'll pack right now, and leave tomorrow.'

‘Now tell me what you have heard Have I ever kept anything secret from you?’

‘I know, I know . . . Oh, I beg you. . . You really can’t imagine how I feel in the depth of my heart!’

Suddenly he burst into tears. A middle-aged man, a sturdy and stubborn soldier, now began to weep like a little child. I realized that his tears were tears of relief and delight. Evidently he believed that I was soon going to be married to the young lady who had just called.

I decided that it was impossible to keep him any longer in the dark. He was quite certain that his assistance would always be needed, and now it seemed that he would be in charge of everything. At last he had found his ideal mistress, and while his old dreams displayed themselves in more tangible forms, he could no longer hold back his tears. I understood his feelings. Suddenly, wiping away the tears with his hairy, massive hands, he asked me if I had fixed the date, and suggested that I should consult the blind fortune-teller who was usually employed in such delicate situations.

I was embarrassed. I did not know whether to laugh or to cry. I dare not rebuke him. Besides, he was not really drunk. It was only that he was firmly convinced that I had no right to keep it secret from him. He suggested that I should immediately write a telegram to inform my people seven thousand li away. He pronounced a sincere eulogy of the lady and I gathered that from the conversation he had had with her earlier, he was convinced that she would make an ideal daughter-in-law in my mother’s eyes.

I tried to calm him. I explained in detail exactly what had happened. With his mouth slightly open, he stared at me and listened intently. At first he was puzzled, then aghast. He believed every word I said, and his immense dejection weighed heavily on my heart. In the end, I decided upon a

white lie, and told him that I was in love with another lady who resembled in every detail the girl in the blue gown. But, apparently, he was still dubious. From his small brown eyes two streams of tears flowed down, and he seemed to be paralyzed.

The clock downstairs struck ten.

'It is bed-time now. Let us postpone the talk until tomorrow.'

And suddenly, struck by my unexpected entreaty, he awakened to his mistake. With a forced smile he apologized for drinking too much, and for behaving like a lunatic, and he swore that he would never drink again, and then asked if I would like some carp for dinner tomorrow. I said nothing. Seeing the peeled apple-skins on the gilt tray, he picked them up slowly before bidding me goodnight. As quietly as a fish he slipped away and gently closed the door behind him. I heard his slow heavy steps plodding down the stairway.

The clock struck twelve . . . I was still sitting up and groping among the intricate labyrinths of human affairs. My mind was no longer quiet. I was aroused from my dreams by a noise, at first barely audible, which sounded on the stairway, gradually approaching my door. It must be the old soldier, I thought, coming to remind me of bed-time. Hastily I turned down the wick of the lamp. I heard a gentle sigh in the darkness outside. 'Well', I said, breaking the dark silence, 'I've just finished and I'm just going to bed.' There was no reply. After a while I went to the door, but he had already gone downstairs.

After this comedy, he gave up drinking and changed considerably. If I asked him about wine, he would say no genuine wine was sold in the shops—only alcohol. He no longer talked about women; he paid no attention to my fair friends, but he was still interested in my work, and he no

longer urged me to save money for my future home, and he no longer criticized my shabby and unclean clothes. His disillusion was so complete, and there was no longer any possibility of patching together his shattered dreams, and he was even more wretchedly buried in loneliness than I was.

Once more the lady came to bid me goodbye before leaving for Peking. Once more she came to dinner. This time, however, besides the ordinary dishes, only one vegetable dish was added. The old soldier seemed rather sullen as he carried them in—I was secretly amused, for he was so touchingly serious with things bearing on his own joys and sorrows. Henceforward, the lady in the blue gown made no appearance in my study. Not long afterwards, I heard that she had been arrested with her husband in Tientsin. I did not tell the old soldier.

Some time ago I promised him that as soon as the summer vacation opened, we would go down together to my native town in the South. For seven years I had not seen its familiar blue sky, nor stepped on its familiar soil. It was six years since he had been there, and now it was early June and there were only eighteen more days before the vacation. Then, suddenly the civil war broke out, and one day he asked me for some money to travel to Nanking. He said he was going to have a holiday there. And now, as he grew more reticent and reserved, I found it increasingly difficult to please him. Day after day he did the cooking and all the trivial affairs of the house, and sometimes he would quarrel with the landlady's maid for borrowing things without telling him. I began to think a holiday in Nanking was just what was wanted. And then he left—and never returned. I do not think he joined the civil war. He did not die. I like to think of him still serving as cook in the army, and sometimes, when he is stationed in a ruined monastery, he will get up early in the

morning and, accompanied by his mate, he will go to the market in search of provisions. He will take a rest in the rice shops, chat with his friends, and stand on the river bank watching the sails float by. In the evening he will sit on a bullet-case made of wicker-work, and there, under the reddish glare of a lamp, settle his accounts with the corporal, and, as he tots up the lists of vegetables, writing in his cramped handwriting on a scrap of waste paper, he will curse under his breath. At night he will lie down on a wooden bed, covered with a patched cotton quilt. So I imagine him living for ever, or at least for another twenty years. He has never written to me, and yet I am certain that he is still living in the world.

That was how the lamp found its way to my desk. Occasionally I still use it. Sometimes, when I am writing about those things which are familiar to me, when I am plunged in meditation, I will switch off the electric light and burn this oil-lamp instead. In such moments I see the old soldier as in a vision, his red face, crumpled army uniform, this steward of an ancient household. And the soundless tears torrentially flowing from his small brown eyes.

SHEN TS'UNG WEN
UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS

THE bamboo raft, nimbly manned by the two men, glided quietly downstream. The raftsmen had passed unseen through the river patrols, and were now only two miles from their destination, but suddenly the raft ran aground on a wild bank overgrown with rushes and reeds, and while the raft remained still and unmoving, they heard the murmuring of the water and the rustling of the wind through the reeds.

Lu-Yi, an officer of the signal corps of the guerrilla troops, began to blame the younger man, hoarsely 'What's the matter?' he asked. 'Are you possessed by devils? You think it's funny, don't you? But if we are stranded here, they will soon find us out, and we shall be shot to pieces by their guns.'

The boy who had been crouching on the raft stood up slowly, but still he made no sound. There was a faint shimmering light on the dark surface of the river, and in the water there lay the reflection of two men standing on a raft, a reflection which was upside-down. Silently the boy walked to the other end of the raft.

'Well, we have run aground. I guess we have caught in something!' It was the voice of a very young boy.

He went up to the older man, and still leaning against the oar which he held in one hand, he took over the bamboo pole and tried to push it hither and thither in the marshy water. They were at a bend in the river where the water was shallow, but from the murmur of the water it was clear that the river ran swift round the bend, and there was no reason why the raft should remain still, unless something had caught hold of the bamboo raft from underneath.

Their spirits were tried. Lu-Yi began to grumble again, impatiently. 'There's two miles to go', he said. 'It's a

desperately dangerous area. There might be enemy patrols at any moment.

The boy seemed to have no feeling for fear or sorrow. He silently listened to the older man, and then untied the automatic pistol and bullet-case from his belt, rolled up his trousers, and gently slid into the water. He found a foothold and stooped down to push the raft with both hands. They heard the long, low squeak of the bamboos, but the raft did not move, and seemed, indeed, to be constrained by unseen hands.

Lu-Yi was still impatient. 'Be careful', he murmured. 'I know you are strong, but be careful. Better take off your clothes and feel with your hands underneath the bamboos. There seem to be devils and ghosts there.'

'Yes', the boy answered, with a little giggle. 'Devils and ghosts. But let me try.'

He began to move slowly in the water, stretching his hands under the bamboos. Touching the ropes and knots which joined the raft together, he stooped down, his arms and shoulders buried under the cold water, and his chin kissing the rippling surface of the river. Meanwhile his feet sank in mud to the knees, and it took an effort to pull them up again. He was still feeling among the knots and ropes when he felt something hard and round striking against his fingers. He realized then that it was a millstone entangled among ropes and clothes. He reached out his hands and felt the cold wetness of a human body. 'A body!' he shouted out in mingled alarm and delight, for now at last he knew what was obstructing the raft. 'A body!' he exclaimed. 'It's the funniest thing . . .'

'Well, what is it?'

He did not answer. He ran his fingers over the body and touched the hair, the face, and then the arms. It was bound to the millstone with heavy ropes, which had somehow curled round the bamboos.

'Even with a millstone round its neck, this body prevents is from moving,' the boy laughed silently

'Then take it away,' the other commanded, and he was more impatient than ever when he heard the crowing of the first cocks in the distance. 'The body of a good-for-nothing', he added contemptuously. 'No good when he was alive, and no good when he was dead,' he murmured softly.

The boy was still wading round the raft, trying to disentangle the rope. Lu-Yi drew his knife from his belt and tapped it against the side of the raft. 'Boy, come here', he said. 'Take the knife and cut the rope in two. If the devil doesn't loosen his hold, cut his hand off. Hurry up! We're in terrible danger, and we have got to get to the army.'

The boy, amused by the expression 'loosen his hold', wondered at his companion's impatience.

There was a muffled noise of a knife stirring up the water, and the raft began to turn a little. A little while later he went to the stern of the raft and put his shoulder against it. He began to push hard, but only succeeded in lifting the raft a little above the level of the water. The raft kept turning, but did not move forward. It was difficult to manage the knife under water, and perhaps in the end they would have to take the raft to pieces and then join the bamboos up again. But there was no time. Besides, less than a mile downstream, they knew there was a pontoon bridge held by the enemy. Lu-Yi could no longer restrain his impatience. He began to censure the boy for his lightheartedness and slowness, and promised to write a report on his negligence, inefficiency, and lack of responsibility. The boy remained calm, unmoved.

'Well, then, we had better walk instead of wasting our time on the river', he said, in a perfectly matter-of-fact voice. 'Otherwise we won't get there before dawn.'

'There are traps laid for us all over the hills and valley',

the other answered 'The devils are ready with their ropes and millstones there. If we walk those two miles, it's likely we'll have millstones round our necks before dawn.'

'Fears can't stop us', the boy replied. 'There's no other way.'

At last the older man was convinced. They carried the two bullet-cases and the rest of their equipment on to the embankment, groping and stumbling in the dark. Then they sat among the tall reeds and whispered about the routes they would take. They had already travelled twice down the river in pitch darkness, but the land route was strange to them, and they had no idea of the ponds and marshes and streams which lay in their way, and the villages and guard stations through which they would have to pass. In the black sky not a single star lay visible. Each one had brought a shirt toich, but in the enveloping darkness they seemed to see eyes glaring at them, and they knew that the slightest light shown by them would call for a bullet from the enemy. And if the enemy knew that they were passing along the river, the lives of all those who followed them on bamboo rafts would be endangered.

After a while they decided not to take the road over the hills, but to follow the path which lay along the edge of the river. The flood water had receded during the past few days, and now the path was dry. Besides, there was always the chance that they would come across a sampan or canoe left somewhere along the bank.

The small path wound through bushy reeds. The earth was muddy and slippery underfoot, and there was a strange smell, a smell which grew inexplicably stronger as they went forward.

'Mind your steps! There's probably another body somewhere around. Don't fall over it.'

'I forgot to feel the pockets of the fellow under the raft. Probably he was one of our comrades.'

'Who else could it be?'

'Now I remember The message of number seventy-four was stitched into the back of his trousers, the message of thirteen was hidden in a cigarette, and . . .'

'Rubbish! Don't talk We are still under close watch Look out, because we don't want to have two more corpses in the place'

Lu-Yi was embarrassed by the strange smell, and thought the corpse could hardly be more than five yards away from them He held his torch in his hand, and made as though he was going to flick on the light, but the boy prevented him They pricked up their ears and listened intently They heard the approaching splash of rhythmic oars They were about five feet away from the river, but thick bushes of reeds screened them from sight They were both aware of the critical situation they were in, for it was evident that the approaching boat was patrolling the river to prevent the guerrillas from using it as a means of communication. If the patrol boat reached the bend in the river and discovered the raft and their footprints, they would be followed immediately, and God knows what would happen then Fortunately, they were already on land. . . .

At that moment, frightened by the steps of the two wanderers or by the splashing of the oars in the river, a waterfowl rose, flapped its wings, and flew up into the dark sky And then, after describing aimless and purposeless evolutions, it darted towards the opposite bank of the river They heard whispers among the oarsmen, probably they already suspected the presence of strangers among the reeds. But the boat, instead of pursuing them, followed in the direction of the waterfowl, and they heard the leisurely pad of oars as the boat went towards the other bank.

The two wanderers lay on the bank with their pistols

pointed in the direction of the boat. They were calm and determined, but when they heard the boat moving into the distance, they held out their hands silently at the same moment and clasped one another's hands with excitement and relief. Then they went on.

They could still smell the corpse, which was evidently lying somewhere to their left, away from the path. Suddenly Lu-Yi felt a hand snatching at his sleeve.

'Devil take you! What do you want?' he groaned.

'I think it is comrade seventy-four. Let me go and feel his body. A minute, or half a minute . . .'

Without waiting for an answer from the older man, who was clearly displeased by the suggestion, the boy bent down and ran swiftly towards the place in the bushes where the heavy, foetid smell came from. He was back half a minute later.

'It's him all right', the boy said. 'And it smells like him. He was a daring and dauntless fellow when alive, and now, even in corruption, his smell is terrific.'

'What have you got?'

'A handful of maggots.'

'Are you sure it is him?'

'Yes, I tore off his collar. The papers are there. I knew it right away.'

'Nice fellows—both of you!'

They strode along the path in silence. They were soon out of the bushes, but new dangers seemed to be lying in wait for them. Soon they came to a hillside, where the path diverged, one road leading down towards the ford, and the other winding strangely among the battlemented rocks. A few lights were shining above the ford, evidently the place was well guarded. They gazed into one another's faces and neither could decide which pass was more dangerous or easier to get through.

Each minute gained gave them more hope, but they had no time to lose. They knew that the path to the ford was more familiar to them, and, if necessary, they could wade or swim across the river. They made a dash for the river. The boy saw that a fire was going out, and was probably unattended, but the older man held him back.

'Don't go near the fire, boy!'

'Don't worry. The fire must have been left behind by the patrols who boarded the boat. Probably they left it intentionally, to make us think they were there.'

Once more the boy won the older man's consent. Crawling on all fours, they made their way towards the dying embers. They passed the fire unharmed, and found themselves before a long, smooth road which wound along the edge of the hills and the river. They were light hearted now, all danger forgotten, until some minutes later the boy thought he heard the clop-clop of a horse's hooves along the road. Lu-Yi listened. He, too, heard the sound and imagined that the enemy was approaching, followed perhaps by a wolfhound trained to smell out strangers at night. They decided to hide in the woods which bordered the hill, and blindly they crawled among the shadows of rocks and trees. Later, they heard the sound of hoof-beats along the road at the place where they had been, and they even imagined they could see the sparks flying from under the horse's feet and the white, thick vapour coming from the horse's mouth, and the sleek shadow of its back.

On his way down the slope, Lu-Yi twisted his ankle, but he knew that he would have to go on as fast as possible if they were to avoid the guard station.

The sound of cocks crowing was wafted down the river. They decided, then, to bury their automatics among the reeds and swim downstream. If they could once pass the pontoon

bridge, they would find themselves in safe territory less than a quarter of a mile away. But Lu-Yi knew that with his twisted ankle, it would be impossible for him to swim. They could go over the hills, but the tracks there were unknown to them, and hardly visible even in broad daylight. Moreover, beyond the hills lay precipitous slopes looking down over a ravine, and it would be easy for the enemy patrols to pick them out.

Knowing that the position was hopeless, Lu-Yi broke out into angry remonstrances.

'Boy, it's a trick played by devils. I know I am going to die here, and become a mess of worms. Next time you pass this way, better feel my collar as well. I can't walk. My right leg hurts abominably, and I am sure I can't swim. You go downstream, and I'll go to the hills—and give me your pistol.'

'No, if you're hurt, I'll go with you. We'll go up the hill and die together if we have to.'

'Why should we die together, my dear little devil', Lu-Yi answered, in a tone of annoyance. 'Give me your pistol, and make your own way downstream.'

The boy was silent. The older man repeated his command.

'I'll do as you say', the boy answered at last in a low voice. He unslung his belt, and all the time he was wondering how anyone could climb up hills and down valleys with only one game leg. He hesitated before handing the pistol over. They had gone on many dangerous errands together, and they had worked well together, and now Lu-Yi had to take the most dangerous road of all. He hardly dared to leave his companion. Lu-Yi saw this, and tried to console him.

'Boy, don't worry about me. With two pistols I shall kill many before I am killed. I prefer climbing to swimming, and in any case your journey will be hard. There may be barbed

wire rising from the bottom of the river near the pontoon bridge. You may have to climb over the bridge—that's dangerous. I think I shall find my way easily enough over the hill, and when I find you I shall give you your pistol back. We'll meet again, my dear little devil.'

Both knew that he was lying. Hardly had Lu-Yi finished speaking when he stepped forward and helped the boy untie his pistol belt, and the bandolier of bullets which fell down from his shoulders. Then he patted the boy on the arm and asked him to jump into the water before he himself went uphill. The kindly dogmatism of the older man, the deep friendship which existed between them, and the strict discipline which existed among the guerilla troops, all these exhorted the boy to slide down the embankment and into the water without another word.

The stream murmured quietly and coldly, and the boy threw himself in the water, imitating the cry of a wildfowl to show that he was already on his way, and meanwhile the older man, as a sign of final greeting, threw a pebble which landed a little way from the boy's foot. Thus, for the last time, they bade each other farewell and went on their ways.

The boy exerted all the strength of his young limbs, and cautiously moved downstream. He saw fires burning at each end of the pontoon bridge, and each fire cast a dazzling shadow on the water. The bridge was formed of a number of sampans and fishing boats fastened together with iron thaws, there was a sentry at each end, and there were also three or four soldiers patrolling the bridge. With his face showing only a little above water, the boy attempted to surrender to the force of the water, hoping to slide under the bridge without making the slightest sound. Suddenly he heard a whistling sound from the hilltop, and a moment later there was the sound of shooting. He knew then that the whereabouts of his

friend had been discovered, but what puzzled him was that there was no answering fire from his friend. The bridge was only two yards away from him, shining in the light of the flares. He dived swiftly. There were no obstacles rising from the bottom of the river. Three yards past the bridge he came to the surface, and at that very moment he heard the automatic pistol shooting seven times in rapid succession. Soon afterwards he heard four successive pistol shots, and for the moment there were no more sounds.

Later he heard three rifle shots, then there was silence, followed by a solitary pistol shot. Immediately afterwards he heard a shrill scream from someone on the bridge. A torch-light swept over the bridge, and all around. Once more the boy dived, and when he came to the surface again all was silent in the boundless darkness except for the interminable murmur of the water beneath his body. The black night air permeating all the space overhead seemed to press down on the river and penetrate through his skin and into his veins. He knew that the safety zone lay less than a quarter of a mile away.

He saw a camp fire blazing through the darkness, and the recognition of the friendly light and the illusory warmth which came from the fire gave him new strength.

‘Password!’

‘Nine . . . ty, with both feet wrapped in cloth.’

‘Why only one? Where’s your companion?’

‘Ask the ghost of your ancestors.’

‘Is he lost, then?’

There was no reply. Only a splashing sound was heard when the boy climbed up the river bank.

CHANG T'IENT-YI
THE BREASTS OF A GIRL

I

THE villagers were discussing the news that Jen San's wife was at Chuang-hsi

'Is her lover living there?'

'Oh yes They have a little daughter, too,' someone whispered, as though he would commit the sin of slander if he spoke aloud, but, in fact, he could be heard ten yards away

'I am afraid the boy she bore Jen San is a bastard, too'

They all glanced at the young man who had made this remark, and there arose a general murmur that such speculations should be kept to oneself

'I'll tell you something—but don't let them know. Jen San's people are going to fetch them back'

'I wonder how Old Chang will take it Imagine our clan producing—er—such a—such a woman!'

Meanwhile, Old Chang, the clan-leader, was making plans.

He crossed his legs and picked his teeth with the little finger of the right hand His face was greasy as though smeared with wax, and a shaft of the setting sun, shining on his face, made it glow like a glass bottle A sense of secret satisfaction came over him, and his crossed legs shook involuntarily, while a few cracked melon seeds on his gown began to toss up and down like little boats in a stormy ocean.

He really could not see what good could come of Jen San's wife eloping with the fellow from Chuang-hsi He wished he could punish the man, too, but his authority did not extend beyond the clan

And he began to pick his teeth with still greater force, as though to show them that he had the law in his hands. He

heard the nail scratching along the teeth, and felt the saliva trickling down his palm

'Beh!' That fellow Liu from Chuang-hsi was only a common peasant! It was curious that Jen San's wife should have fallen in love with him. A strange feeling overcame him. His crossed legs shook more violently. The husks of the melon seeds, unable to remain on the gown, fell to the ground.

As soon as she was found, he would certainly flog her until her back was a mangled heap.

A shudder went through his body.

The flesh on the body of Jen San's wife would not stand whipping. Ever so soft was her flesh—oh no, it was wrong to call it flesh, it was jelly, it was butter, the lightest touch would destroy it.

Old Chang sighed. Really, her flesh would not stand whipping. Take only her cheeks—oh, he knew what her cheeks felt like, for he had already pinched them. Yes, in spite of exposure to the sun, the rain and the wind, her face was still tender, and he began to wonder what her other parts were like.

Jen San's wife had been flattered by his compliments. She was not easily pleased, and she had stared at him with black shining eyes, crying 'What is it?'

'Now don't pretend to be a good woman', he had said. 'I know perfectly well Jen San does not satisfy you.'

He had pushed out his right hand with the long nails in the direction of her breasts, but she had pushed it away.

'How dare you—in broad daylight!' she had exclaimed.

'Well, then, not in broad daylight, but at night—Jen San is such a lily-livered fellow, isn't he? Come on, let me . . .'

'Go away! Go away at once!'

He was angry then.

'What did you say?'

'I said—don't make use of your position'

'Just you repeat that!'

And he ran forward towards her, but first he looked round and saw nobody. There was only a dog scuttling along the bank of a stream, leaving footprints like plum-blossoms on the muddy earth. He was quite sure that this dog could not speak. He wanted very much to snatch her into his arms. To bite her lips would be to contain life itself. He wanted to eat her up. Her rosy cheeks. . . His eyes were a network of bloody veins, and the blue veins on his forehead stood out.

Meanwhile she moved away from him, cursing him loudly in words which he did not hear.

'Now my dear cousin, don't be so. . . I'll give you anything you like, only let me——'

'Go away, you beast! Aren't you headman of the clan? Well, then, how can you rule the clan when you behave like this? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. . .'

He was more angry than ever. 'Eh, don't be too proud, my woman! I'm raising you up to my own level, I am. All the best intentions, too. . .'

'I don't like your good intentions. Because you have money and position, you think you can have any woman you like in broad daylight?'

'Say that again!'

'I'm not afraid of you. You have always been a beast, you've always cheated the Jens and you've always been a pest to the clan.'

'Eh!' he muttered, his fingers quivering. 'Take care what you are saying, young lady!'

'Why should I be afraid of you? I'll tell everybody in the clan you have been trying to seduce me.'

'Good God, this woman is a regular shrew', Old Chang said to himself.

It was easy enough to be angry, but when he looked at her cheeks, just her cheeks—more tender than jelly, more soft than butter—it was quite another thing altogether. And her fluttering eyelids, and her red lips opening to disclose two rows of perfectly even white teeth.

He wondered what to do next. He could not force her. If he did, she would tell everyone that headman Chang had seduced her. He must not be impatient. It was all a question of woman's psychology: they said one thing and meant another. Take that young lover of hers. Had she not acquiesced to him? Women were always like that. Jen San's wife would not always be evil-minded towards him.

The next day he had brought a jade bracelet and gone down to the stream. The sun was setting. Jen San's wife was hulling the evening rice.

'Hulloah there!'

She did not answer.

'Are you still angry with me?' he smiled. 'Still pretending to be an innocent young woman, eh? Well, look at this!'

She continued to hull the rice without turning her head.

'Well, why don't you turn round?' he said, with an actor's intonation and an actor's turning of the head. Meanwhile the hand holding the jade bracelet described a circle in the purple evening air. There was still no reply.

He felt irritable. He could not leave things as they were, and besides—his right hand, which had once pinched her cheek, trembled with a curious sensation which was not itching and not numbness, but something quite different from these. He remembered pinching her perfectly. His fingers had left a white mark on her cheek, and only gradually had it resumed its pink colour.

All this had happened some time ago. He had failed to have

her, for immediately afterwards she had fled to the arms of her lover.

'Bah! Blind to my affection! If ever I find her, I'll give her a sound whipping.'

Then one day her old mother-in-law, Mistress Hsiang, had come to report that Jen San's wife had gone to Chuang-hsi. The old woman was trembling, for her son Jen San had not yet paid back the money he had borrowed from the clan-leader.

'What shall I do?' she moaned.

'Go and fetch her back!' Old Chang exclaimed, banging the table so hard that his hand turned bright red. 'Elopement! Debauchery! D'you hear? She has defamed the whole of the clan. Go on, fetch her back—I'll show her the law of the clan!'

II

Some days later, when the girl had been brought back, Mistress Hsiang called together the clan-leaders and her own kinsmen, and the parents of Jen San's wife, to a meeting in the ancestral temple. Old Chang was there as usual, picking his teeth, scowling, and saying over and over to himself 'Better not drive her away. Keep her here—that's better, but have her punished, eh?'

As clan-leader he had power to summon Jen San to his presence.

'Do you still want that woman?' he asked, and without waiting for an answer he went on. 'I think we ought to give her some punishment. Make her learn to behave better. What do you say? If we drive her away, well—I've every reason to believe that people will know about it, and the reputation of the Jens will go down in the world. After all,

she is the wife of a Jen, isn't she? Let's just punish her and order her to behave better.'

Jen San did not know what to say. He looked puzzled, but he knew he would have to take the clan-leader's words on trust, because the clan-leader had always treated him well and had even lent him a hundred and forty dollars.

'What do you say?' Old Chang shouted, waking him up and gazing into his eyes. 'If we drive her away, the name of the Jens will go down in the world. You may think it all right, but I don't.'

It was decided to punish her. She would be brought to judgement before the clan-leaders at the ancestral shrine. All the little boxes in the ancestral temple were now opened, revealing the carved wooden tablets on which were inscribed in gold letters the names of the ancestors, for it was necessary that they should be informed of the outrage done to the clan's name. A tray lay on the table. In the tray lay a piece of scarlet silk, and when a puff of wind swept through the room, it fluttered nervously. Underneath the great table chains, ropes and split bamboos lay in a confused heap.

Several times Old Chang was filled with an ungovernable desire to pick his teeth, but he always refrained. With up-raised eyebrows he scrutinized the elders of the clan before him, and then his eyes wandered towards Jen San's relatives sitting in a row, all with different expressions on their faces. And then he saw her. She was standing a little behind Mistress Hsiang, and her shadow broke into two parts as it climbed up the wall.

He looked at her and then looked at the others and looked at her again. Unconsciously his right hand went to his teeth, but noticing what he was doing, he slipped his hands in his long sleeves. And now everyone was looking furtively at the girl, and Jen San's near relatives especially stole frequent

glances at her—not too often, for they were afraid of being detected by Old Chang

Her face said nothing. She kept on biting her lips. She looked a little paler and a little leaner than before, but she was still plump and sturdy. Now she cast her eyes on the ground, as though she had made up her mind what to do.

Then Mistress Hsiang stood up and outlined a list of the girl's crimes from the beginning to the time when she was arrested, and she demanded that the clan should pass judgement on her before the ancestors.

Everyone's eyes turned towards Old Chang, but the eyes of the girl remained still.

'Mistress Hsiang has made clear the situation of the case', he began. 'The parents of the party accused are also present. It depends of course on whether you Yings want to punish her.' Ying was the name of the girl's parents.

'I won't let my daughter go unpunished after all she has done,' said Mistress Ying Fu-lai.

'All right. I know you are intelligent people. You won't let your daughter . . . Well, let me question her. Let me . . . ' His hands went to his teeth. 'Come on', he shouted to Jen San's wife. 'What have you got to say for yourself?'

She said nothing.

'Answer me!'

Silence.

'Speak! Answer my question!'

A little while later he said: 'Why don't you speak?'

'I've nothing to say', she murmured, as still as a stone. Everyone was taken by surprise.

'Never mind if you won't confess! I know everything!' Old Chang shrieked. 'Everyone knows, d'you hear? Everyone. And we have got permission from your parents to punish

you Our dear sister, Mistress Ying, has agreed . . . Well, we'll have to talk it over '

He leaned over and whispered into the ear of the second elder of the clan

Everyone sat up straight and held their breath The attention of the whole assembly was now centred on the two elders in secret conference

'I think the case is clear to each one of you', Old Chang said at last, drawing his hands from his sleeves and sitting up. 'It is an unpardonable disgrace, of course It stains the reputation of the ancestors As the leader of the clan I am resolved to rectify the corrupt customs of modern times and to make an example of her for those who believe in unholy principles and have no regard for morality There is absolutely no respect for filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, honesty, uprightness and sense of shame. This is an impossible situation Licentiousness is the greatest of all evils—of all evils! An impossible situation The good name of the whole Jen family is stained She must be given exemplary punishment Kneel down!' Saying this, he hit the table frantically, and the tray with the fluttering red silk began to tremble. He went on: 'Jen San, strip her! Beat her a hundred times!'

Then he watched Jen San stripping her outer clothes, and it occurred to him that her lover in Chuang-hsi had undressed her just like that and then held her in his arms. He turned pale. He hoped Jen San would not pull off her underwear by mistake.

Now she wore only a blouse and a pair of trousers made of unbleached calico, her breasts sticking up from underneath the blouse. Though hidden, the place of the nipples could still be seen How many times had that lover of hers caressed her breasts! When Jen San took off her outer jacket, he had heard the clink of silver dollars . . .

She knelt on the ground facing the throne of honour, her hands firmly held by her mother and mother-in-law.

Jen San spat on his palms and picked up a split bamboo from under the table

Whissh! He raised the stick and slashed her across the back

Then followed a second blow Jen San clenched his teeth The muscles bulged out on his arm The third, fourth and fifth blows were delivered, and others followed with accelerated speed

The split stalk of the bamboo began to give way, and only the solid stem remained.

What had become of the jelly-like flesh of his wife no one knew, for it lay concealed beneath her blouse One could imagine what changes it had undergone merely by observing the steely quality of the bamboo, the increasing fury of Jen San and the whizzing which accompanied each blow The white flesh would swell along the lashes and turn purple and blue Then, after more blows, the swollen places would bleed and the white blouse would be soaked with blood

She made no sound She clenched her teeth tightly until they hurt She did not struggle, but as each blow fell, she shrank instinctively Her hands were locked in the hands of her mother and mother-in-law, and she could not move sideways She closed her eyes, enduring the pain A tear fell from the corner of her eye Every time Jen San raised the bamboo she prayed, not that the blow would be lighter, but that it would not fall on an open sore Her wish was unanswered. The torturer drew swollen lines on the yet unbruised flesh, and then cut the bruises open so that they bled

The white calico blouse was stained with blood and the green bamboo was covered with blood

One hundred.

Jen San panted for breath, wiping his sweating forehead with his shirt sleeve

Old Chang's jaw moved spasmodically

'Now do you still intend to go to Chuang-hsi?' he asked in an unnatural voice. Everyone was looking at Jen San's wife. She was gasping for breath, her eyes closed.

'Why don't you answer?' asked her mother.

'If only you would repent for what you have done', Old Chang smiled

'I . . . I . . .'

The whole world waited silent and breathless for her answer.

'I . . . I . . .'

'Well?'

'All the same I am going to Chuang-hsi.'

Her voice was feeble but the effect of her statement was like the explosion of a land mine. The assembly looked at one another, their eyes wide open, their mouths agape, as though stupefied.

The blue veins on Old Chang's forehead rose visibly and his face grew ashen. Whore! She would let that low peasant lover of hers hold her in his arms! Ungrateful woman! He beat the table recklessly and shrieked at the top of his voice, as though to give vent to all the anger within him.

'Beat her! Beat her again!'

She bent her head low, and her body began to quiver spasmodically with each new blow. Suddenly she fainted. People began to sprinkle her with cold water.

'Beat her again when she comes to', Old Chang shouted

There was blood on her blouse and her trousers. Her mother's hands shivered and tears began to well out from her eyes.

'Answer the question. Are you going to Chuang-hsi again?'

She made no answer.

Her mother began to plead for her, tears streaming down her cheeks 'Please say you won't Please say you won't'

Her daughter looked up with tearful eyes, saying 'Don't be afraid, Mama . . . I am . . . I am going . . .'

Old Chang felt that his lungs were exploding and he roared hoarsely 'Beat her again!'

Once again the girl fainted. But she did not complain, she allowed the blood to trickle down her body, and she refused to say what was expected of her. She hoped they would give her up as a hopeless case and drive her out of the family. Old Chang knew exactly what was going on in her mind, and therefore he had said nothing about driving her away. He would go on beating her until the infatuation had gone.

'Are you still going to Chuang-hsi?' he shouted, spluttering a spray of saliva 'Strike her until she repents!'

There was no more flesh on her body. Her blouse and trousers were entirely red. Six times she was beaten and six times she fainted. There in the ancestral temple nearly everyone had their eyes tight-closed because they did not dare to look at her. Some wiped their tears stealthily from the corner of their eyes. Her father hid his face in his cupped hands. Her mother cried. Mistress Hsiang blinked tearful eyes and shook her head. Jen San's hands trembled. He could hardly hold the bamboo any longer.

'Well, then?' Old Chang said in a voice which he could barely recognize as his own.

She half opened her eyes.

'Yes . . . Yes . . . I am going to Chuang-hsi . . .'

He was so wild that he wanted to destroy the entire world. He jumped up, beating the table with his fist.

'Beat, beat!' he shouted frantically 'Jen San, why don't you beat——'

Jen San's hands trembled. He did not move.
'Beat——'

Her mother burst out crying aloud and dropped on her knees before the clan-leader.

'Pardon the poor child. . .'

Then the second elder of the clan rose, saying that it was probably impossible to beat her any more.

'Put her in confinement!' said Old Chang.

The assembly heaved a sigh of relief.

. III

In the fields the trees were bare, the hills were great mounds of yellow earth, the wind was chilling.

During those months Old Chang appeared to feel concerned over Jen San's wife, and whenever he met Jen San, he would say

'How's your wife?'

'She's obedient, but she doesn't say anything.'

'Be careful. Don't let her run away.'

'Yes, sir—it doesn't seem likely.'

'What about the bastard?'

'My mother-in-law took her away to her father in Chuang-hsi.'

Jen San's wife refused to talk to people. Several times Old Chang met her on the banks of the stream, where she was washing rice or vegetables, but he found it difficult to talk with her, for though he had been right in punishing her, it seemed to him that she still hated him. He consoled himself with the reflection. 'I mustn't hurry her—that would be too dangerous. The proverb says "In haste you won't get what you want". Jen San is only a weakling, and if she could forget her lover in Chuang-hsi everything would be all right'.

A crisis came about ten days later. It was not, however, the crisis Old Chang desired.

At last Jen San's wife broke her long silence. She talked and laughed exactly as before, and was particularly amiable to Mistress Hsiang. She painted herself with 'liquid powder' and did her hair up in a smooth knot. Whenever Jen San had time, she would sit quite close to him and pinch his thighs, whispering into his ears no one knew what sweet words. But afterwards she would look at Jen San through the corners of her eyes, giggling and smiling, and Jen San laughed derisively and cursed aloud.

But Mistress Hsiang, realizing that something was afoot, remained ill-at-ease. As soon as Jen San and his wife went to bed at night, she would lock the door of their room.

The news reached Old Chang, who was greatly displeased by the turn of events.

'Why the devil should he lie with such a beautiful wife? The idiot! The pig! The ox-dung on which a flower is planted by mistake!'

And now, since she was as friendly as ever, he thought that by slow degrees he could ingratiate himself into her favour, and perhaps in the end she would come to appreciate him.

He smiled, his eyelids narrowed into a thin line, and he slipped a jade bracelet on his wrist, and suddenly the thought flashed through his mind: 'Perhaps she likes silver dollars better'.

At sunset he strolled by the stream. There were five silver pieces in his pocket.

She had just finished washing the rice and she was about to return home.

'Oh, I see you are busy', he said.

'It's the clan-leader', she smiled back at him.

He went nearer. She did not shrink away. Suddenly he was tongue-tied, he did not know what to say to her. Should he assume an air of dignity, or behave lightly? He stood there speechless for some time, and then stammered 'Is . . . er . . . is I mean, is Jen San at home?'

'Are you looking for him, sir?'

'Not exactly, no, not exactly . . . I don't want to see him in particular. Tell me . . .'

The woman looked at him, smiling. He longed to pinch her. How could he put it into words?

'Do you like silver pieces?'

Jen San's wife smiled and at the same time lowered her head. With her lips protruding, she murmured

'Jen San will beat me if he hears of it.'

Old Chang itched to hold her in his arms, he wanted to pull her into the house and lie with her, he wanted to bite her gently, and caress her. It was terrible that Jen San might beat her!

'Let me protect you . . . if you are afraid of him . . .'

He went nearer. He rested a hand on her shoulder and squeezed her, then his hand travelled from her shoulder along her arm. She offered no resistance. This was the second time he had touched her. This time it was with the left hand, for the right was still holding five pieces of silver.

He was going to slip them into her hand.

Then he thought. 'No, five was a little—er—a little too much. He put two back in his purse, and gave her the remaining three.'

She smiled but did not take them.

Thinking this was due to her timidity, he tipped them into her pocket. On the way to her pocket, his hand touched her breasts—this was the third time he had touched her, and this time it was with the right hand again.

'Learn manners', she squinted at him. 'We'll be seen.'

He burst out laughing, showing a row of irregular teeth with brown stains. Probably he had not picked them after his evening meal.

'Don't be afraid of Jen San, darling. Just think it over. Any day you like. . .'

'Yes.'

'You'll let me know in a few days?'

She nodded and ran hurriedly away.

Old Chang sighed with gratification, and then began to describe a few circles in the air with his head like a connoisseur admiring a picture. He was disappointed because he could not have her that night, and he murmured 'God send me speed.'

The sky was orange-coloured, with here and there a few broken clouds.

IV

He always picked his teeth when he was talking with the agent.

'Go and tell Jen San he must return the money by the end of the month. With the interest. And tell him I won't prolong the loan a single day.' He picked his teeth again.

'Tell him I've extended the loan twice, and now I need the money urgently. I must have it, do you hear? Are you listening?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You don't look as though you are listening. It's an important matter. I must have the money back.'

He wondered whether he should tell the agent about the girl. He knew Jen San could not pay the debt, and this was exactly what he desired, because he could then demand a hostage from Jen San. But before he could explain the

matter to the agent, the agent himself was leaning forward and confiding in his ear.

'Shall I tell him to send his wife as a pledge, eh? When the money's paid he can have her back.'

The clan-leader, though secretly pleased with the suggestion, pretended to regard it with horror.

'Shut your mouth, you fool! You can't treat people like that.'

'Well then, let's send her here as a servant.'

The clan-leader thought for a while.

'All I want is the money back!' he said, banging the table with his fist. The agent left, but when he was near the door the clan-leader called after him. 'Wait a moment, there is something I want to discuss with you, but—you understand—not a single soul must hear about it.'

The agent returned, bowing and scraping.

'Of course', he said. 'I owe all I have and am to you, sir. You're kinder to me than my parents who bore me. You ask the people—they'll all say I am grateful to you. I would gladly die for you, sir.'

'Yes, I trust you and I appreciate the work you have done for me.'

Some days passed. The agent went to see Jen San and explained that the debt must be paid at once. Jen San was utterly dumbfounded.

'It's all over', he said.

The agent smiled and whispered. 'As a matter of fact it isn't all over. There are so many ways out.'

'He might raise the interest?' Jen San said hopefully.

'No, that won't do at all', the agent said, with a malicious grin. 'He is determined to have his money's worth.' The agent smiled again. It occurred to him that if he fulfilled his mission, the clan-leader would hold him in high esteem.

'I'll go and beg the clan-leader myself', Jen San said in despair

'Oh, that's not possible either', the agent remarked, his eyes wide open, as though surprised 'You know what his temper is like. When he wants something, he is implacable. I've got an idea which I think — I just think, mind you — might be acceptable to him.'

Jen San was almost in tears. He cried out in alarm

'Yes, what is it?'

'Send him a pledge.'

'I haven't got anything.'

'Well, send him a human pledge.'

Jen San sighed with relief. There was a human pledge in the house, all right. But —

'Is the clan-leader willing to accept her?'

'Stupid ass! Go yourself and see the clan-leader, and see what he thinks.'

'Will you come with me?'

'Yes.'

So it was arranged that they should go to the clan-leader some days later.

V

Some more gossip came to the village.

A beggar from Chuang-hsi village had brought a piece of paper and given it to Jen San's wife. She could read and write, and she wrote a message on another slip of paper for the beggar to take back to Chuang-hsi.

'And she gave the beggar two silver dollars.'

When Mistress Hsiang heard about the matter, the beggar had left.

Old Chang was bitterly disillusioned when he heard the news. His desires were still ungratified, he had given her

three pieces of silver, and it would be terrible if she ran away. He had hoped she would be good to him, but she had given the beggar two pieces of *his* silver. It was, of course, an outrage. But then he thought that after all she was a woman, she would yield as soon as he could get hold of her, and the only thing was not to let her run away.

Jen San was also worried at the thought that his wife might run away, for then it would be impossible for him to pay his debt. He would have to hang himself. He thought if he went to see Old Chang as soon as possible, the papers might be torn up and then, even if his wife did run away, everything would be all right.

'Concerning my debt, sir . . .', he stammered, stealing a glance at the agent who accompanied him and who seemed to be saying, 'It's all right—everything is in order'. So he continued in a weak voice, like a fish. 'I'll send her here if it pleases your honour.'

'Shut your damned mouth!' Old Chang shouted. 'I won't have a loose woman as my servant. This is absurd. You must give me my money back. Go on—get the money—the sooner the better!'

Jen San felt that his whole body was dipped in ice-water. Did not the agent say that the clan-leader would consent to the project? He had hoped eagerly that the debt would be cancelled as soon as he produced the hostage.

Jen San's wife was a lump of jelly, a lump of butter—that was true. But Old Chang had never thought for one moment of losing the hundred and forty dollars. What he desired was that he should keep the woman as hostage until Jen San could redeem her. Besides, if the woman came to live under his roof, he would be under the disadvantage of being the subject of gossip.

He began to pick his teeth.

'I'll raise the interest three per cent', Jen San floundered, hopelessly 'Just let me have the money another year'

'No!' and the clan-leader retired into an inner room.

'Whatever shall I do?' Jen San asked the agent.

'Let me try for you', the agent answered, and he too disappeared into the inner room

Ten minutes later the agent returned Jen San still felt like ice-water.

'It's all settled', the agent said

'How?'

'We'll go and talk about it outside.'

Jen San's knees were shaking, he was so happy

'Is it all right?'

'Well, it's like this', the agent answered, blinking like an electric fan and gesticulating with his hands He explained that as long as Jen San's wife served the clan-leader, everything would be all right But the clan-leader wanted the girl to remain in Jen San's home, and whenever he wanted her, he would send for her Finally, he uttered a warning. 'Don't breathe a word about this to anybody, you understand?'

'I won't say a word', Jen San agreed quickly, 'but what about the debt?'

'It's extended to the dragon-boat festival next year, and the interest is still four per cent But not a word about this to anybody.'

That evening the clan-leader sent a message round to Jen San's house to say that he wanted the wife. Jen San was ordered to accompany her to the bridge lest she should run away, and at the bridge 'Old Chang' would meet her No one else, not even the agent, was allowed to accompany them.

The half-moon rose in the east like an orange-slice. Old Chang strolled towards the bridge, his high cheek bones jutting out and glimmering in the moonlight It occurred to him

that the scenery was entrancing. Dead branches were dancing. The greyish hills in front were smiling, and the grave-mounds resembled the breasts of Jen San's wife.

Yes, but the grave-mounds were hard. He looked away towards the west, but there was still no sign of her.

He wondered if she still bore a grudge against him. 'Jen San will beat me if he hears of it.' This is what she had said with her lips protruding a little. She had allowed him to touch her, and she had shown her resentment towards her husband, smiling that lovely smile of hers.

He sauntered to and fro, picking his teeth. From time to time he rubbed his face with his hands, smearing it with the saliva from his fingers. He walked ten yards in one direction and ten yards in another, startled by every sound. Suddenly he saw two figures approaching. He was certain it was she—he could recognize her thirty miles away.

He was so excited that his body was shaking all over. He would.

Jen San turned his back and went home, and just at that moment he reached out to touch her breasts.

'What are you hurrying for?' she giggled.

'I've been waiting for ages, I can't wait any longer, let's go now. . . .'

'Just one moment.'

'Oh please!'

'Let me have a rest first. It's such a lovely evening.' She smiled sweetly up at him, and seemed to be a little out of breath.

She looked along the road she had come. Jen San was already out of sight. Everything was quiet. The moon shone on her eloquent eyes. The clan-leader watched her intently, from time to time pinching her rosy cheeks, her breasts, her legs. His eyes grew dim and his knees weakened. He wished

he could fly with her into the Ningpo bed which lay waiting at home. He felt so heavy

‘Let’s go now.’

She made no answer even when he caught her up in his arms

Suddenly there was a sound like an explosion. She had hit him in the face with her clenched fist. His nose was bleeding. He staggered back.

‘What did you do that for?’

‘Because I am going to Chuang-hsi.’

She was about to run when he caught hold of her arms.

‘Swine! Beast! Pest!’ she swore at him, hitting him over the head. ‘You’ve fallen into my trap now. Swine! Beast!’

She pushed him so violently that he fell in the mud. Then she began to run, crossing the bridge and going northwards, passing over fields and streams and hills, making for Chuang-hsi. She avoided the main road.

‘Jen San’s wife has escaped!’

People were sent out to pursue her, but they never found her. Even at Chuang-hsi there was no trace of the woman or of her lover. The men of Chuang-hsi said that she had arrived before daybreak. Her lover was waiting for her. They prepared a few things and disappeared with their baby daughter. No one knew where they went.

TUAN-MU HUNG-LIANG
THE SORROWS
OF THE LAKE OF EGRETS

THE moon was slowly rising, encircled with a halo, like an eye reddened and swollen with weeping. It rose over the luminous bronze mist which hung over the surface of the Lake of Egrets, a mist so suffocating that it was as though a cloud of crystal dust hung dizzily in the air.

A swarm of egrets, stretching their wings and putting out their long necks, flapped slowly over the reeds which border the bean-fields. And when they had passed, the air sank once again into its wonted silence, for the kingfishers, with their tiny brilliant emerald head-dresses diving and skimming over the surface of the water during the daytime, had long since disappeared. Only a few reddish-brown dragonflies were droning over the rotten rubbish-heaps. Meanwhile two men came walking along the shores of the lake.

One, who was tall and swarthy, knelt on his knees and began to lay out a strip of straw matting on the earth. The other, who was slighter and leaner, held in his hand a spear decorated with red fringes, and he gazed into the distance as though trying to discern the boundaries of the vast darkness.

‘It’s terribly damp’, he sighed.

The other paid no attention to him, too occupied with the mat; and now he seated himself unsteadily, grasped his knees in his hands and lifted up his eyes to the moon.

‘There will be a full moon soon’, he said. ‘There’s no need to sleep in the hut tonight. We can lie here on the ground and look at the moon’.

‘It’s a fiendishly red moon tonight’, the other answered.

‘Yes—ominous’.

‘They say a red moon like that foretells a war.’

'Perhaps.'

The two companions were silent for a few moments. On the other side of the lake a gust of gloomy white vapour arose to spread out on the surface of the lake. Far away in the valley, among the young bushy poplars, a glimmering light emerged, but it soon vanished like a will-o'-the-wisp.

'Be careful. It's likely that there will be a thief or two', the stronger man said. 'If they come, my nose will be able to smell them out.'

'Well, what if they come?' We can scare them away. There's always one or two of them every night.'

'Scare them away? No, it's better if they have a taste of my fist. The festival day of the Moon Goddess is soon coming.'

The younger answered bitterly. 'Your fist isn't worth a moon-cake!'

'How do you know? At least it will have its fun.'

The younger laid his spear on the ground, took off his wet shoes and crouched down on the mat. 'The fog is heavier than before', he muttered, and at the same time an incomprehensible and startling fear began to throb in his heart. He glared into the dusk with his deeply musing eyes, but there was no relief from the pain.

As the moon rose higher, all reality seemed to melt away gradually and distinctly into a smoky haze. Shadows peered out from everywhere, gazing at them. A dark poplar tree cast a shadow almost twice as long as itself over the surface of the water, and a rock, which jutted clear out of the water, lay clad in grey mildew visible still under the great mass of shadow. Over the whole lake there prevailed a mysterious air of disconsolate sadness.

'Brother Lai-pao, how old are you now?'

'Twenty-three—no longer a child', Lai-pao answered.

'I am still sixteen, but mother says that next year I shall no longer be paid as a child worker.'

'The less you work the better. Don't be so anxious to work, for everything in the world is wrong. You're not strong enough. If you work too hard, you will get consumption and for the rest of your life you will be miserable.'

'How can I avoid it? Father is old—last year he was given three pills by a man who loved charity, but it was all useless. I'll go on contract for a year and earn a hundred dollars, and then everything will be better.'

'But who will take you? Who is going to be so generous as to pay you a hundred dollars a year? In the whole place, there were no crops worth a hundred last year. . . And you are so thin. . .'

'I can work hard. . .'

'Well, don't worry about tomorrow. There's some wine here. Won't you have some—it's good wine!' He felt under his girdle and brought out a small jug and a few pieces of bean-curd.

The younger one shook his head dreamily, and watched his companion eating.

'Yes, there is something I forgot to tell you, Mah-nao. Changes are going to take place. The little general is going to the capital, and the soldiers will soon be starting for the front. And it's quite true—not just the nonsense that people are always talking. And there's a secret order hidden in someone's shoes, to be delivered to the guerrillas. That's why they never examine the clothes of the people passing through the gates—they only examine the shoes. They say there's no harm in letting the guerrillas try. . .'

'Brother Lai-pao, let's join the guerrillas one day.'

'Yes, when the time comes. Yes, everybody has to take his part. We are all Chinese, aren't we?'

Mah-nao, the thinner of the two, sank in deep thought
 'Then we shall own a strip of farmland, eh?'

'No, it will still belong to the landlord, but the crops will
 be worth more, and besides—more workmen will be wanted.'

'I see', Mah-nao sighed. 'So we are never going to be
 prosperous, we'll never be rich.'

'Is your mother going to get you a wife?' Lai-pao interrupted bluntly.

Mah-nao blushed and said nothing.

'There's enough bean-curd here', Lai-pao said. 'I've got
 enough. Taking a wife is like buying cattle. Your father will
 soon be retiring. I've seen him walking along the edge of the
 lake, so bent that his head and his feet almost touch.'

'To take a wife, you have to have enough money. Mother
 gave me two pieces of clothing for my betrothal, but the girl's
 mother was not satisfied and said that girls are worth more this
 year. If we had not been engaged since our childhood, they
 would have done everything they could to cancel it.'

'O curse the world—mothers, soldiers, wars—they take
 everything, even keep their daughters to themselves. Well,
 why don't you take some bean-curd, I can't eat so much?'

'All night my father is coughing, and mother has to get up
 and bring him some hot water to soothe him.'

'It's all a pity. Let's lie down and sleep. We shall have
 to get up at midnight and look after the thieves.'

Lai-pao laid the spears between them and lifted a ragged
 cotton-padded coverlet over his head and ears.

'Are you going to sit up for them?' he asked, looking up
 from under the coverlet.

There was no answer. The other picked up a corner of the
 coverlet and silently lay down. Dogs could be heard barking
 from a distant village, but soon the sounds died away. By now
 the mist had enveloped everything, still more streams of

impenetrable vapour arose, rolling in curls like milky smoke, hovering among the reeds which lay before the two companions, congealing into tiny, cold, crystal balls, barely visible. And still the vapour rolled on, scattering its white sticky matter, reaching little by little towards the yellow mist which hung over the lake, pierced by the moonlight and resolving into great masses of boundless vague luminosity.

'Brother Lai-pao, you said that soldiers were starting for the front. Are they starting in the light of the full moon, as in the story of the Tartars?'

'....'

'Brother Lai-pao, have you seen my father?'

'...'

'Are you asleep—deep in sleep?'

'...'

He was turning from side to side, making a little noise.

'Brother Lai-pao...'

A pair of disappointed eyes were staring into the thick darkness.

The mist grew heavier, everything was hidden in this veil of obscurity. The two young men lay fast asleep by the water's edge. Behind them lay the bean-fields, chequered with ridges and furrows. The plants were already dry, withered. The beans in their shells were waiting for the moment when, fully ripened, they would be reaped and cut. On such a moonlight night the grasshoppers did not chirp, for the damp air clung so tightly to their glassy wings that they could not move them. A faint rustling stirred among the dry leaves, followed by silence.

Mah-nao murmured in his dreams: 'Don't beat me—no, don't beat me there—not on my loins'. A hedgehog with spotted quivers was aimlessly snuffing around his back; but

low, alarmed by the sound of human voices, it withdrew in the direction of the bean-fields

The dry leaves rustled still more, but by now the hedgehog was far away. Then they heard the sound of treading.

Mah-nao sneezed and woke up. He pressed his ears to the ground and listened attentively. He heard the sound of a rattle, the dry stalks falling to the ground, someone binding them, footsteps, interminable shuffling. His eyes were wide open in the dusk. He looked inquiringly at the moon and thought to discover the time.

He pushed Lai-pao with his arm. 'A thief!' he said, his voice almost inaudible. He pushed the boy again, and suddenly Lai-pao rose, waving his arms in bewilderment. He pressed his ears to the ground. He could hear something from the direction of the new fields. He grinned slyly. 'Need of a good fist!'

'Shall we catch him?'

'Yes—we want that moon-cake!'

So they rose noiselessly and stealthily walked towards the new fields, bending very low lest they should be seen by the crop-stealers, who would run away before they could be caught. Mah-nao strode along and then threw himself headlong into the thickly-grown bean-field.

'Curse the man!' he thought. 'A good fist for a festival present—poor fellow!' Meanwhile he grasped tightly the red-fingert spear.

The fog was so heavy that the two companions soon lost sight of each other, and only by the slight rustling of the leaves could they make out each other's movements. Lai-pao, more experienced than the other, went straight towards the new fields, his fists firmly clenched, creeping forward like a lion through wild jungle, watching eagerly for the approach of his victim. His glaring eyes groped through the reddish mist.

Suddenly Mah-nao heard a yell of pain and the sound of something thumping to the ground. Lai-pao had flung himself on a man, and they were wrestling grimly.

'Curse your hairs! Do you think it all belonged to you?' Lai-pao shouted, and all the while he was showering blows with his fists on the helpless victim. 'This time, you old grey-head, shout if you dare!' With all his strength he was holding down the neck of the unfortunate crop-stealer.

'Father, father!' Mah-nao cried out with the voice of a madman, and he suddenly threw himself between the two struggling on the ground.

Lai-pao was stunned. He rubbed his eyes. 'Eh, what's that?'

On the ground an old man was writhing, pale, writhing with pain, out of breath, a thin stream of blood on his ash-white face.

The young men were dumbfounded and had no idea what to do.

As the old man made an effort to rise to his feet, he shook his head remorsefully. From his appearance it was clear that he had been a strong workman in his day. Though his back was terribly bent, he had been a good harvester thirty years ago.

'Uncle Mah, Uncle Mah', Lai-pao muttered, wondering how he would ever be able to apologize to the old man.

The old man paid no attention to him. He jumped up, picked up a coil of rope and a sickle and stumbled away. After a while they heard him cursing them over his shoulder.

In silence the two youths wandered back to their resting-place.

'There's no more sleep for me', Lai-pao said with ill humour, as he sat down and once again grasped his knees in his hands. 'You can sleep if you wish.'

'You despise my father, don't you?'

'No, I don't despise him. Go to sleep', he answered, straightening his broad shoulders

'I shall have to earn more money', he said after a while.

'What's the use of earning more money when you are poor?' Lai-pao snorted contemptuously

'My father . . . he's an old man . . .'

'But he's strong, anyway'

'Strong?'

'Yes, why not?'

Mah-nao lay on the mat, overcome by a boundless melancholy. His brain was numb with fatigue. Before his eyes there lay only a wasteland, hopeless, silent, except for the ceaseless yell of his father even when at last he fell asleep

When he woke up, he thought he heard someone talking in the distance. More crop-stealers? But perhaps Lai-pao was still sleeping, and it was his own father returning to steal more crops? Suddenly sobering, he realized that Lai-pao had already left him

On the verge of the western sky the moon was swinging like a great ball of molten fire. It was not long before day-break. The ghastly crowing of cocks came from a neighbouring village

'Ah, come now—why are you so shy?'

He could not tell from which direction the voice came

'All right, strike me—strike on my breast! Swine! But you would like me if you knew how lovely I was!'

Listening to these words, Mah-nao was appalled, overcome by some strange horror which rose up into his consciousness. Meanwhile he heard a sickle rattling, bean-stalks were falling, some one was binding them together, and then there were hurrying footsteps, sounds of eagerness, anxiety, coming from a long way away. He was frightened. He felt he would be more comfortable if Lai-pao was with him.

He plucked up courage, clutched the red-fringed spear and went straight in the direction of the sounds.

No, he was not accustomed to this kind of thing. With heavily beating heart he imagined a giant, with a great ragged beard, waiting for him, lifting a sickle, striking him over the head. . . He was nearly crying. He wanted to go back and ask for Lai-pao's assistance. But there was no sign of Lai-pao, only that dim impenetrable yellowish emptiness which surrounded him on all sides.

'Who's there?' he asked, in a loud voice which faltered a little. He felt that if he could threaten his opponent, he would pluck up courage.

Immediately a young girl, lifting her sickle above her head, jumped away from him.

'Go on, go away quickly! Stealing crops, is that what you are up to?' Now that he knew that his opponent was only a young trembling girl, he became so bold that he could not help wondering why she did not run away as fast as her legs could carry her.

'You are so small, and yet you come stealing?'

'Didn't my mamma—didn't she tell you?'

She was so frightened that she curled up into a little shell, the sickle still in her hand, and she enunciated her words one by one as though they were being choked out by hot smothering air.

Mah-nao never knew why his voice suddenly became kind. 'Perhaps it was curiosity, perhaps it was because he wanted to pacify the terrified creature standing in front of him.

'Well, who is she—your mamma?'

'Didn't she tell you? Didn't she speak to you?' the girl answered, terrified, trembling from head to foot. She felt that it was all over, her mother had never really seen the man.

'You see, there are two of us. Perhaps she talked it over

with the other one. Don't be frightened, I didn't know anything about it—I was sleeping'

She glanced at him doubtfully, and let her sickle hang down. Mah-nao was so uneasy that he wanted to burst out crying. The girl turned her back to him, and began to wield her sickle mechanically over the bean-stalks. From time to time she peeped at him slyly from the corners of her eyes.

'Have you a father?' he asked at last, disturbed because he had no idea how to treat her.

The girl shook her head and went on cutting the stalks. Her little hands could barely grasp the bundles she had formed, and she cut them with so much difficulty that he wanted to help her.

'Have you a grandfather?'

'He's coughing. They say he will die very soon.'

'Coughing?'

'Yes. At night it's terrible.'

'Does your mother boil hot water for him at night?'

'Why?'

'To soothe him.'

'No, she has no time.'

'Why hasn't she enough time?'

'She has to steal the bean-crops.'

The girl yawned slightly, and sighed. She had cut down less than a man would cut with a single stroke of his scythe. And yet she went on cutting as though her whole life depended upon it, never becoming exhausted.

'Where is she now?' Mah-nao said, still puzzled.

The girl seemed to be slightly taken aback by the question, and muttered: 'I don't know'.

'But how can you come out here all alone?'

'My mother said that I can cut the bean-crops when she is coughing.'

'Oh yes, your mother', he murmured again, and once more sank into deep contemplation 'But aren't you afraid? You know, on misty nights, it is difficult to see clearly'

She looked at him, her eyes glistening, her body growing thinner and smaller

'Haven't you an elder brother?'

She shook her head sadly

'And no younger brother?'

She sighed

Mah-nao looked round in despair. The moon was waning over the western horizon. The bottomless white vapour was still suffocating and spreading out slowly, congealed by the cold morning air into thousands of tiny glistening dewdrops which were gradually sinking into the valley. The reeds, the trees, the hills, all those colourless masses with confused outlines, were lunging out of the dusky twilight. The cocks were crowing again like yearning ghosts.

The girl's hand was bleeding. She wiped it on her clothes, and continued reaping.

'Have you a home?'

'Yes', she said, straightening her back and taking a deep breath. Her ribs protruded out, and she looked weary beyond endurance. 'Please don't ask me so many questions.' She cast a stealthy glance at him, afraid of having annoyed him. 'I've gathered so little, and my mother is coming soon. She'll beat me!'

She muttered these last words reluctantly, and seemed already to be recoiling before the blow.

The thick waves of fog floating over the dim earth were no less smothering than the poison gas that puts people to death. Now, at last, the layers of fog floating over the cloud grew thinner, and were swept away into emptiness.

He left her, unconscious of any aim, staggering like a

omnambulist, but after he had gone twenty paces he suddenly decided to return, and he came back to her with long strides. And, seeing him return, the girl was filled with terror.

'I've gathered so little,' she complained 'Just a little more. My mother will be coming soon.'

Mah-nao seized the sickle, and without saying anything, he began to cut down the bean-crops for her.

Cocks were crowing in the distance. Dawn was coming up over the horizon.

TUAN-MU HUNG-LIANG TIGER

THERE were all the colours in the world on the autumn leaves, there were some which sparkled with all the brilliance of the day, and others which resembled the grey evening of life—reds, yellows and buint siennas, and innumerable other colours. But Old Chu Chuan, bending over the fallen leaves which he gathered for fuel, paid no attention to these bright colours as, followed by his dog Tiger, he raked up the leaves of autumn. Tiger was playing with the leaves, pretending to be surprised when they blew up in gusts, and sometimes he would hum mysteriously through his square, fleshy mouth. Old Chu Chuan loved the dog, whose thick, soft hairs shone with dusted gold, almost more than life itself.

The wind whirled, and all the leaves, heart-shaped, or shaped like the palms of the hands, streaked with parallel veins or stars, were caught in the twelve-toothed rake by the old man, and then stored in the little cottage already heavily loaded with leaves. The wind in the forest was capricious. At one moment they were still, at the next moment they were all swept up into the sky.

The old man moved silently, but the dog hardly appeared to approve of his silence. He played tenderly with the leaves, assuming the most ridiculous postures, trying to make the old man smile and share his enjoyment. But the old man was more intent on broken branches, which he could collect and store away, or else, if no one was watching, he would insert the edge of his knife under the branch of a sapling as thick as his forearm, and then, having cut off its branches and broken it into many pieces, he would hastily push it among the dead leaves in his hamper, to find himself a moment later coughing cheerfully as though nothing in the world had

happened. At such moments the dog, knowing what was happening, would prick up his ears and watch eagerly to see that no one came to disturb the harmless pursuits of his master, and he would continue watching until it became clear that there were no other sounds in the forest save the whistling of the wind and the rustle of falling leaves.

Old Chu Chuan found a dry branch, not thin, but worm-eaten. He spat through his grey beard into his hands and rubbed them together, and at the same time he would concentrate all his strength in his shoulders with the intention of cutting the branch down. The white branch resisted; white chips dropped from the wound in the bark, and then, at last, while Tiger growled contentedly, it was hacked off the stem. Then Old Chu Chuan wiped his face with his hands, patted Tiger's head, and silently resumed working.

Now footsteps could be heard in the distance, and the old man was a little taken aback. But Tiger was silent, proving that there was no stranger coming. The old man congratulated himself on his luck, but nevertheless he spilled more leaves over the branches he had stolen, and he gazed into the distance.

'There you are, you old thief! Stealing firewood again, and there's a log here as thick as a rice bowl. All belongs to the old landlord!'

It was Round Chap, who had only recently returned from three months' imprisonment in the city, carrying a basket of dung on his back, and shouting cheerily at the sight of the old man's trick. Then he looked round cautiously, afraid because he had shouted so loud, afraid for the old man and the unexpected misfortunes he might have called upon the old man's head. And the old man was thinking how he had only felled two little poplars, and the west wall of his house had fallen in during the rainy season last summer, and somehow he

would have to prop the wall up again. You could hardly call it thieving, and yet Pocky Abacus, the chief bailiff, had taken the wood away from him. All this had happened to Round Chap, and much more, for a little while later he was brought before the magistrate and sentenced to three months' hard labour.

'Well, well, it's nothing to worry about', the old man told himself, looking at Round Chap, and he was pleased now that Round Chap had come to share his loneliness in the forest. With his hands waving and feet dancing he went to the hamper, lifted the leaves and displayed his secret treasure. 'Look—only a little one!' he exclaimed delightedly. He made a clicking sound with his tongue. 'We can't go away without taking a little, can we?'

'It's so very little', Round Chap answered carelessly, and he began to chop down a new branch with his sharp dung-pole; then he broke the branch in three pieces across his knee and dropped the pieces in the hamper. 'Nothing at all!' he pronounced. 'Mother's! Why not chop the whole forest down? Look at it—the wood's a thousand years old, thick and dark, and no one allowed to touch it.' He was pointing to the wide, dark larix trees, the most famous trees in the forest.

'It all belongs to the owner,' Old Chu Chuan said sadly. 'You don't want another three months' labour, do you?'

Round Chap paid no attention to the old man, but began to speak caressingly to the dog, which leapt up to his chest.

'Tell me, old man, is this the same dog?' . . . Heard about it in the city. They said the landlord was going after Chao Mo-kuan's wife, and your dog Tiger came and bit him in the leg. Is it true? Wonderful! Mother's! I didn't know dogs were so wise. Why, as soon as I heard the news, I drank two more cups of old white wine to celebrate.'

The old man could not forbear to smile proudly.

'Why, that's true. . . . That cursed landlord, and the

roman was no good either. The landlord has enough concubines to fill eight waggonloads—the more the merrier—at or lean—and there they were, lying in the graveyard, and he with one eye on his wealth and power. Tiger didn't like—not one little bit—knocked the landlord over. It was a right to make your heart glad!' The old man shook his head in extreme happiness, and bent down to stroke Tiger's smooth head with its blaze of gold. 'There you are! No one dared to touch him, but Tiger wasn't afraid!'

'Tiger ought to have bitten the swine to death . . .'

'Well, yes, it has been a serious matter. A life has had to be sacrificed.'

'I thought you were only joking, old man.'

'I wish I were. You can't bite a tyrant's leg for nothing. He insisted that Tiger should be put to death. In repayment—that's what he said. I asked him what he meant. The dog hadn't killed him, and even if it had, would a dog's life be repayment for his. Well, when the bailiff heard me, I got beaten with his horse-whip, and he wanted me to kowtow to that damned landlord. Curse his ancestors! One day I'll fight to the last breath of my lungs against that swinish landlord!'

The old man was so excited that his face turned white.

'That's good—they didn't kill Tiger after all', Round Chap approvingly stroked Tiger's golden mane, which hung smoothly along the dog's neck. 'They didn't sacrifice him, eh?'

The old man looked reprovingly down at Tiger.

'Oh, you're no great hero. Someone else had to die for you, but it wasn't your fault', and the old man sighed, feeling, perhaps, that the dog had been wronged, and so he tried to excuse him. 'I couldn't let Tiger be killed. I consulted all the people I know, and decided to substitute another dog which looked like Tiger, and all the time Tiger was living with your third uncle on the South Hill. Well, the next day, just

as we expected, the devil of a bailiff came over and he killed the other dog. There's no reason why a strong dog like that should be murdered for them . . .'

'Pocky Abacus did that?'

'Yes, and he said I was excused from further punishment only on account of my poverty.'

'I hope he is cursed for eight generations!' Round Chap exclaimed, and because he could find no further vent to his indignation, he stuck his dung-pole deep into a willow branch. 'He will live to see this dung-pole sticking inside him!' Round Chap concluded bitterly.

'Don't make too many bruises!' the old man exclaimed, looking at the branch which now lay broken at his feet, but he was not angry. He had long coveted the branch, and seeing it there he was like a schoolboy who was suddenly given a sweetmeat he had never been able to afford. 'My child, you have made so many bruises on the trees, and the forest ranger will surely say it is my fault.' Yet the old man was pleased, and he got some earth from a ditch and stained the wounded stub of the tree which was already exuding green pus, and now it looked like an old cut.

'Mother's! Why do you take all that trouble?' Round Chap exploded.

But the old man made no reply for some while. He was calmly and carefully sweeping up the leaves.

'You should think of the future', he said at last. 'It's hard to leave one's native land.'

The leaves, too, must have thought it hard to leave their native land, for they whirled up in a gust of wind.

'Tiger, come here!'

Tiger was running in circles with something red and feathered hanging from his mouth.

'It's a pheasant!' Round Chap shouted delightedly, and in

is voice there lingered the incomparable smell of a fat and tender pheasant. 'Where did you get it?' he asked, with his eyes wide open

Tiger barked gruffly, making a sound like *whangg-whangg*.

'Did you catch it all by yourself?'

'Whangg-whongg'

'Is it for me?'

'Whangg-whangg.'

'Good dog! We'll eat it together!'

'Whangg-whangg.'

Old Chu Chuan embraced the dog excitedly, and said in a rembling voice 'You're a good dog. Wonderful—you can catch things even when they are flying!' Then he picked the full-feathered pheasant from the earth and cried out: 'But it's so fat!' He was still holding Tiger tightly in his arms and exclaiming: 'Why—you can even catch things when they are flying!'

'Nonsense, pheasants are the most careless things', Round Chap interrupted 'Everybody knows that they get weary when they are chased by some other bird, and then they fall down in a heap of straw, and you can catch them easily from behind.'

'Rubbish! He caught it flying! Didn't he catch a hare for me yesterday?'

Round Chap smiled compassionately, and said nothing for a while. Later he said: 'Let's go back together. I'll carry the things for you.'

It was already dark now, and the old man nodded, and together they arranged the firewood in the hamper, which they carried between them

The house was only a barn for stacking firewood, with two rooms, a thatch roof, a door of woven willow twigs, and

firewood everywhere. It was wiser than the landlord's barn, which had real pinewood beams and slate tiles. These two rooms, from the first mud brick to the last stick of thatch, had been built by the old man himself. It was here that Round Chap and the old man came to drink wine and eat up the pheasant.

The pheasant was fat, and the wine was unusually fragrant. While they ate, Tiger gnawed bones on the hearth, holding them down with his forelegs, murmuring gruffly at the back of his throat and gazing entranced at the table. In this small house all three were perfectly content.

Round Chap presented a leg of the pheasant to Old Chu Chuan, and took a wing for himself.

'The pheasant is just as fat as usual, but we men have grown lean.'

'And there is only death left to us.'

Round Chap was already drunk, his eyes were bright red. He seemed to be about to say something, but instead he took up the wooden cup and emptied it down his throat. They were completely surprised when they heard someone knocking on the door.

'Damn!' the old man said to himself, and immediately he went up to Tiger to prevent the dog from barking. He took Tiger and tied him up in the inner room among the firewood, and threw branches on him so that he should be completely hidden. Then he hobbled to the door.

'So it's only you, Ma Chen', he exclaimed in disgust, looking down at one of the landlord's ill-favoured servants. 'If I had known it was you, I wouldn't have troubled to hide Tiger. Look at that pheasant—Tiger caught it for me. Caught it flying. What do you think of a thing like that?' The old man filled a cup and offered it to Ma Chen. 'I'll let the dog loose now—there's nothing to worry about', the old man continued.

'You had better not Pocky Abacus, the bailiff, is coming'

Old Chu Chuan turned pale, casting a perfunctory glance at the remains of the pheasant and the wine

'What the devil's he coming for?'

'He wants to — Mother's! — he wants to muck about with Shao Mo-kuan's wife. There's a warm *k'ang* here he can use for a bed, and he's thinking of staying here all night, and he might even take the house over if she's good enough to him. He's coming now. You had better hurry!'

'Come on!' Old Chu Chuan said in despair, looking at the pheasant leg which lay untouched on the table and popping it into his mouth. 'Come on! Eat it up! Drink up the wine!' Ma Chen began to eat.

Round Chap gazed into space, thinking of a man and a woman together, holding each other tightly, in a dead stupor of sleep. He spat, and looked at the firewood, which filled the house. We are going to be driven out in this damned cold weather while a man and a woman enjoy themselves to their hearts' content.

'And what's more', Ma Chen continued, gnawing the pheasant bones, 'And what's more, he gave orders that you should heat the *k'ang* at once!'

'What with? My firewood? I've sweated blood for it. What for? Just to heat his bed? I don't mind them doing what they want to do, but why should it be in my house?'

Round Chap, instead of being depressed, suddenly showed signs of extreme mirth. He began to do a little dance of his own.

'All right!' he said. 'Let's heat the bed. Let's make it really warm for him!'

He was smiling mysteriously and looking at the puzzled faces of the others. While the others were clearing away the

dishes, he took an armful of firewood and, placing it in the firedoor, he kindled a small fire. He was deep in thought, remembering his father who had been a waggoner in the landlord's employ and had died from the 'blood-spitting disease', because he was compelled to carry too heavy loads. His mother could not stand her sufferings, and she ran away with a wandering herbalist. He himself had suffered more than once at the hands of the landlord. Once he broke a red-enamelled bowl and the landlord had him beaten almost to death, there was still an ugly round scar on his forehead, from which he derived his name, Round Chap. 'And damned if tonight the bailiff of the old swine isn't going to come here and muck about with a loose woman, and damned if I didn't have to go to prison for three months. . .'

Gazing at the red flames gently licking the firedoor, he thought he saw the flames of his accumulated hatred blazing with them. His strong, peasant face was tormented with strange passions, and he experienced an exhilaration he had never known before. The fire shone on him, and waves of gold illuminated his strong body.

'That bailiff cheated me on a bushel of red rice', Ma Chen groaned miserably.

'We're just mud under his feet', old Chu Chuan grumbled.

A voice came from outside.

'Anyone there?'

Old Chu Chuan put a hand to his throat and interchanged a glance with Round Chap. 'He's come!' he whispered.

Ma Chen hid the remainder of the pheasant and the wine in the earth, and began to sweep the *k'ang* with a straw broom which he had found in the firewood.

'Get out of here—all of you!'

At that moment Pocky Abacus, the chief bailiff, strode into the room like a cold wind. As though the room was too

all for his majestic person, he turned round and round like
op. He was followed by a man carrying a pair of red,
ckly padded quilts, a flowery cotton mattress, and a
ollen blanket, which he spread carefully over the *k'ang*.
'Get out of here—all of you! Have you heated up the
ng? That's right. Put more wood in. H'm, not warm
ough. Go on—put more wood in!'

Round Chap thrust a whole bundle of firewood through
e firedoor.

'Do you think you can warm it up with whole bundles?'
e bailiff exclaimed, and as though he were shooting away a
ir of mice, he drove Old Chu Chuan and Ma Chen out into
e cold and barred the door. 'Go on—heat up the *k'ang*', he
d, sitting on a small stool near the fire, and watching Round
ap burning the firewood.

Old Chu Chuan thought of the dog Tiger as soon as he left
e warm room. It was too late now, there was nothing he
uld do to rescue the dog.

There was a cold wind, and Ma Chen trembled.

'Well, let's go.'

'I'm waiting for Tiger.'

'Round Chap will bring him out.'

'Round Chap isn't as reliable as all that.'

'Well, the wind's changing.'

Old Chu Chuan sneezed and blew his nose. He was
orried about Tiger, and wanted only to save the dog.

Ma Chen went away, unable any longer to stand waiting
the cold. With his hands thrust in his sleeves, he said
ome and wait in my house. Warmer there.'

Though the cold was increasing, the old man had no idea
hat to do. He stood there, underneath the window of the
use, waiting for Round Chap and silently gazing at the
ewood he had gathered with so much pains during the day.

Seeing, among the leaves, the willow branch Round Chap had broken for him, he was afraid Pocky Abacus might see it, and thrust it further among the leaves. Then he continued to meditate on the best plan for saving Tiger. The night wind was growing fiercer. 'Well, it's a wise dog', he told himself. 'He won't make a sound. He knows the enemy is near.' And in this way he became less fidgetful.

In the dark he wandered towards Ma Chen's house, while the wind rose and pierced him like scissors.

'Go on—more fuel! Make it really hot! That's what I like—a bed as hot as toast!' Pocky Abacus was shouting at Round Chap, though the bed was already warm enough.

'Now, my man', Pocky Abacus continued, 'you ought to learn your place in the world. Open your eyes, and see where your ricebowl comes from. Come on, let the fire burn! You're a good-for-nothing.'

Turning to the servant, Pocky Abacus said 'Mother's! Can't you see you ought to put a cushion there to "support the feet"? Aie you mad? What's happened to the girl? Hasn't she come yet?'

It was only when the servant had brought some burning embers on a plate and laid them in the centre of the *k'ang*, that Pocky Abacus felt warm enough to remove his fox-fur gown, leaving him only with a sheepskin coat. He was afraid of catching cold, for fear that his pleasure during the night might be lessened.

'Well, bring me something to drink', Pocky Abacus shouted at his servant. 'Where's the smoked fish? Mother's! What do you think you are doing, Round Chap? Go on, make the *k'ang* so hot that it will burn the flesh! . . . Ha, ha, ha, ha!' Thinking of God knows what, he broke out into loud laughter, and he said, over and over again: 'Ha, ha! Burn the flesh, eh?'

With one eye half closed, Round Chap was stealthily watching the bailiff, meditating with hatred in his heart on the man's broad face and sheepskin coat. The face was full of coloured pocks, from which he derived his name, and at one end of his mouth there was a little flesh-ball with three curling black hairs growing out of it, nearly an inch long, and, according to the travelling physiognomist, these hairs and the flesh-ball were a sign of abundant food and rich clothing. The rest of the man's face was shaved clean and smooth, but the upper lids were fleshy and swollen, wrinkled and hooded, whenever he looked or gazed at anything. Round Chap was conscious of the sullen glare which came from the man's eyes, and felt it as a kind of hideous enchantment, as though Pocky Abacus was attempting to steal his soul away. Suddenly Pocky Abacus turned on him.

'Get out of here!' he shouted. 'Get out of it! Don't look at me like that.'

'I'm only heating the *k'ang*!'

'Mother's! You dare answer me back!' And he kicked Round Chap in the buttocks. 'Get out! Do you hear?'

Round Chap, who had been bending over the fire-door, stood up unsteadily, rubbed his hands together with dry leaves, and went out into the cold.

He hid among the firewood heaped beneath the window outside. Lying there, he could no longer feel the wind on his face. He struck a match and began to smoke, meditating silently on the fate of all the firewood which Old Chu Chuan had collected during the bitter autumn weather . . . His heart ached, thinking of the old man's wife and children, the efforts and hopes of a life which were somehow consecrated in these two small rooms which he had built only a little while before and which sheltered him from the wind and the

rain. There, alone, the old man had hoped to spend his winter, warm, comfortable, no longer harassed if a fall of snow occurred outside, or if the hail blew down. Round Chap thought of all the wood so carefully stored. What did it all amount to, anyway? The wood was only the produce of the earth and the mountains. Well, whatever happened, Old Chu Chuan would still be all right.

Round Chap began to feel more cheerful. Something was hanging on his eyelids, and touching his eyes lightly with his hands he was surprised to find two icy-cold tears. He did not remember when they first appeared. He laughed softly, and let the tears fall on the ground. He could hear sounds from within the barn, the door-bar opening and Pocky Abacus's voice. 'Go on—find that damned girl quickly, or else . . .' The servant staggered out of the barn, and the door-bar was closed quickly again.

Round Chap asked himself whether the girl, too, should be burnt in the flames.

'Why not?' he murmured to himself. 'Think of whom she is sleeping with. Shameless!'

He was impatient now. He wished the girl would come quickly, and at that moment he heard her whispering and laughing in the distance.

'My master says you must come quickly.'

'That impatient little monkey! No, really, I'll keep him waiting just a little longer.'

'For the Lord's sake, mistress—not a moment more. Think, mistress, the earlier you go, the sooner you eat cabbage soup with four ounces of sugar.'

'Shameless pig!'

'Isn't that a nice thing to say? Please, mistress, be kind to me . . .'

Already Round Chap could see Chao Mo-kuan's wife

proaching in the darkness, a pale face painted with cheap Japanese cosmetics, a small body swaying rhythmically.

'I'll burn you into a little black egg', and Round Chap buried himself deeper among the firewood with his teeth pressed tightly against each other. The woman was standing in front of the door.

'I've come, dear', she whispered

A faint voice came from within the bairn

'Mother's! Do you think you are the Goddess of Mercy, taking me wait on your pleasure'

The door opened and the girl slipped in, and Round Chap stened intently to all the sounds that came from the room. When he was certain that they were lying on the *k'ang*, he began to set light to the dry wood underneath the window, and he cautiously began to pile firewood before the door and over the thatched roof.

The flames roared, spreading all round the house, and at the same time the hatred that glowed in his heart, that hatred which had been embedded like a fossil within him for so long, became now a fresh flower to add to the flames. He laughed as he looked at the blazing red flames, a hearty vigorous laugh which came straight from his soul.

Remembering the words of Pocky Abacus, he kept on repeating. 'Burn—that's right—burn properly', and because he knew that it was already too late for them to escape, he began to dance round the house, and afterwards he lay in a ditch and looked with a smile of satisfaction at the conflagration.

The flames were towering into the heavens, and from far and near the villagers came running with their fire pumps and wooden casks and long poles and quilts, shouting and dithering. The gongs of the fire brigades from distant villages could be heard, as the wind grew stronger and the flames sent kisses to the sky.

'It's Old Chu Chuan's house We've got to save him!'

These were the words that Round Chap heard on every side. He opened his eyes wide, and jumped out of the ditch, waving his arms and saying 'It's not Old Chu Chuan. It's Pocky Abacus and Chao's wife having refreshments, and Old Chu Chuan has been sent out into the cold.'

A roar of laughter greeted his remarks, a roar which gathered speed and seemed to be fiercer even than the fire.

'Do you know what I think it is?' Round Chap continued. 'They made the *k'ang* very hot. That's how it must have got burnt.' And to himself he said, 'Burn fiercely, fire!'

The people who had come up to quench the fire now stood idly by, lost in enjoyment of the flames. Some thought it a shame that the firewood should be wasted on two such useless people, and pitied the old man who had gathered it with so much pains. But in the whole of their lives they had never known such satisfaction.

Everybody agreed it was a fine fire.

Yet suddenly something happened which proved that it was not perfect. Old Chu Chuan was seen to be running madly towards the flames with his cotton-padded gown unbuttoned, and his arms flapping like butterflies' wings. Ma Chen was running after him.

'Tiger! Tiger!' he kept on shouting.

Round Chap was taken by surprise.

'Is Tiger inside? Tiger?' He shook the old man by the shoulders and wanted nothing more than to hear the old man saying 'No.' But now even he remembered that he had seen Tiger placed under the firewood in the inner room. The old man kept sighing, and would have thrown himself into the flames after the dog, if the people had not held him back.

Angrily the flames rose, and leaves half-red were lifted high in the air. A cataract of molten lava rose miraculously

inst the black-purple sky, whirling and rolling and plunging straight up into the sky. The west wall of the barn was ready collapsing, date-red, with glowing ashes flying in every direction. And there seemed to be a smell of burning. It occurred to Old Chu Chuan that Tiger might already have been burnt to death, and he was entirely beside himself. 'I must save Tiger!' he shouted angrily, and once again people dragged him back from the flames.

In his agony the old man began to sob like a child.

'Ma Chen, pour water over me, quickly!'

Some people objected to this, thinking that he would lose his life, but when they thought of Tiger, and how the dog could bring good cheer and warmth to the old man, and try food, and how handsome he looked with his square jaw and golden hair that glittered all over his shoulders, they agreed with compassion.

'No, no, the dog must be saved', they said to one another.

So Ma Chen and some of the younger men soaked Round Chap's clothes with water, and tied a thick wet rope to his waist, and handed him a snail knife, because they remembered that Tiger was fastened to the woodpile with a piece of string. Then they pumped cold water on the fire in the places where Round Chap had to go, and then Round Chap threw himself into the muck of flames and smoke.

The water vanished in steam, and the fire rose still more fiercely, and the people who held the end of the rope were in fears for his life. The rope lay there motionless for a long while. Then suddenly, from the flames, a strange creature flew out, covered with sparks, and everyone realized that Tiger had been saved. There was tremendous applause. The dog was wrapped up in a blanket and laid tenderly in Old Chu Chuan's arms. And still there was no sign of Round Chap.

At last Round Chap emerged, stumbling, half-blind, baked

into unconsciousness, and wounded in several places. He, too, was wrapped in a quilt. Meanwhile Tiger was being handed round from one to the other, exactly as though he were a beautiful baby in a circle of loving women. Only a little of his hair was burnt, and there were no wounds.

Round Chap opened his blackened eyes and said, 'Where's Tiger? Is he saved?'

'Yes, yes, he's saved! He came out with flying colours', the old man replied.

Round Chap smiled—a peculiar gratified smile. His wet clothes were being changed, and he was shaking with convulsions. Tears were falling from Old Chu Chuan's eyes. They were not tears of sorrow, but tears of deep compassion and pity, and he kept saying to himself, 'We've suffered too much—really too much!'

Meanwhile, the fire burnt merrily. Blazing embers were taken out of the fire, and the people danced round them, and their laughter and cries rose like a wave of the sea, and Old Chu Chuan wrinkled his nose and tenderly laid the dog Tiger against his bosom. Round Chap grinned at him. A long while later the fire burnt out and the people enjoyed their revenge.

'It's all right', Round Chap said. 'Now we have had our revenge!'

PIEN CHIH-LIN
THE RED TROUSERS

THE village of Anchū was plunged into a profound gloom when the women changed out of their red trousers.

The Japanese soldiers who held the Tung-pu railroad only ten *li* away, had announced that they were calling on the village. Their arrival two months before had taken the form of a raid, and their stark ferocity had sent the villagers fleeing from their homes. After their return to their houses, which had been sacked, little time was given them to repair the furniture which had been burnt, and now there came news that the Japanese were 'pacifying' the villages down the line and had already reached the neighbouring village of Lu, where an eight-year-old girl, according to rumour, had suffered an experience—to call it merely unfortunate would have been beyond the moral sense of the villagers—from which one of her age would have been thought immune. The excitement reached its climax the same afternoon with the discovery of a letter at the village meeting-house. The letter must have been delivered by a *hanchien*.¹ It commanded the people of the village to prepare quietly for the arrival of the 'Imperial Army', which would arrive the next day for purposes of 'pacification', and if any of the villagers were found to have escaped the 'Imperial Army' would leave not a single house standing in the village after its arrival. There was no longer any doubt of what was coming. Immediately after this, the women took to the 'modern style': they snipped off their long hair with scissors, leaving something like a boyish bob, whether they liked it or not.

¹ Literally, one who betrays the Han race—now any Chinese traitor.

Most of them regretted that their feet were still bound. But even then the most noticeable thing in their clothes was their red trousers.

To the three-month bride of Kwan Hsiao-shuan the taking off of her red trousers presented a practical difficulty. Hers were unquestionably the newest pair of red trousers in the village, and though they too had been dipped and washed in muddy streams along the ravine, their colour had lost nothing of its loud brilliance. What troubled her was not whether she should take them off, for that no longer required any consideration, the question was, what trousers to change into when these came off. Amid the confusion of their last escape to the hills, she had lost the parcel which contained all her clothes, and some pieces of Hsiao-shuan's. In the two months since her return she had been able to make up only a few of her underclothes, a pair of shoes and two pairs of socks, and she had not thought of the need of another pair of trousers, much less of another pair of a much less obtrusive colour. She fell back upon her parents' home, hoping to find someone with a pair to spare, but no one could help her. It was getting dark when she returned, and in the dim light of the oil lamp she climbed on to the *k'ang*, where she sat alone in blank despair.

Then Kwan Hsiao-shuan, to whom the afternoon had been no less gloomy, returned, and straightway the problem of the red trousers was solved.

In the early part of the evening young Kwan Hsiao-shuan had exchanged a few harsh words with the village deputy at the village meeting-place. He had come away from the meeting unusually sullen and bad tempered. When he entered the room and saw his bride still wearing the red trousers which had once pleased him, he looked stunned, then, as if suddenly awakening to a sense of what had to be done, he

ped off his black cotton trousers and tossed them to her
es, saying drily 'Change into these'

His wife glanced at him

He quickly returned her glance and repeated in a loud
ce 'Change into these'

His wife knew his temper well enough not to ask any
estions, and the order was carried out instantly

They also exchanged their padded coats, he took her green
it, and she wore his black one

The young wife, though full of curiosity and suspicion,
ed not utter a word

Tears came into her eyes when she saw that her husband
s going out again. He paused at the door to look back, and
d gruffly 'Go on. Get to sleep. I'll be back tomorrow'

When the first rays of the sun were shining on the trees
next morning, the 'Imperial Army' arrived. There
ere eleven of them in all, but only ten horses, for the
hanchien among them had come on foot. Before they appeared
to pacify the village, they were ushered into the village
meeting-house by the *hanchien*, who ordered the village deputy
to have tea served at once.

'The "Imperial Army" will not eat up any of your
provisions', the *hanchien* told the village deputy. 'Just fry a
w *ch'unghuapin*'²

'Allright'

'The "Imperial Army" will not require anything from
our poor people', the *hanchien* continued. 'Only this—while
our people are waiting to receive "pacification" they must
eat some cabbages.'

'All right'

² A round flat cake made of wheat flour with minced onions and
fried in sesame oil or lard: a favourite food of the northerners

'And some turnips.'

'All right'

'And look round for a hundred fresh eggs'

The deputy unconsciously knitted his brows, he hesitated, and on recovering from his hesitation he said again 'All right'

While the ten horses were feeding on yellow beans in the open yard before the village meeting-house, seven Japanese soldiers and one *hanchien* were gorging themselves on the *ch'unghuapin* behind the trellised paper-window. But where were the other three of the 'Imperial Army' They had gone away, so it was said, to inspect the vegetable fields

When the seven had finished eating, the fat sergeant turned to say a few words to the *hanchien*, who immediately spoke to the village deputy. 'Well, I think it is time for pacification now Go and sound the gong Collect the whole village together, so that they can hear the words of pacification.'

Exactly eighty persons appeared from the eighty houses in the village Not one more. Half of them were children who had been dragged out of their homes to make a presentable number. One full shoulder-load of cabbages, another of turnips, and a basketful of eggs were already on display in front of the village meeting-house.

The fat sergeant stood on the stone steps and began to pacify in Japanese with the *hanchien* acting as interpreter 'The "Imperial Army" has never met with defeat. Never! It is truly invincible. We have come, not to kill, but to protect the Chinese people. . . The Eighth Route Army and the dare-to-die corps are the most barbarous bandits in China. . . From now on you must report to the "Imperial Army" whatever news you hear about these bandits. . . '

Then began a series of questions and replies.

'Does the "Imperial Army" kill?'

Jo!

Di loot?

Jo!

Di burn?

Jo!

Are you afraid of the "Imperial Army"?

No, we are not afraid!

Then why is it that you choose to stay when the bandits
e, and run away when we come?

lence

realizing that he had given himself away by asking this
question, the fat sergeant considered it time to end his speech.
The next time we come, don't run away Hasn't every-
g been safe and sound this time? We never disturb the
ple.

Now they were ready to leave The vegetables and the
s were also ready, only they were still short of three men.
The fat sergeant told the *hanchien* to ask the villagers if anyone
seen them, or knew where they had gone But no one
w anything

The village deputy sent some villagers to look around.

They came back a long while later saying that 'they had
n not a shadow of them'

Then the village deputy himself went in search of them.

That slut, Kwan Hsiao-shuan's wife, must have capti-
ed all three by her display of bridal colours Thinking in
s way, he pushed open the door of Kwan Hsiao-shuan's
e-room house There was Kwan Hsiao-shuan huddled and
nging on the far corner of the *k'ang* Half angry and half
lined to laugh aloud, the deputy exploded

'Ha, ha! You're a brave soul! I never thought you would
le there like a woman Come, where has your wife taken
e three devils she has seduced?'

Hardly had he finished before he realized that it was none other than Kwan Hsiao-shuan's wife on whom he had been whetting his wiath. Stunned by this discovery, he was too angry to laugh, and he retreated at once in order to start a house-to-house search for the devils.

After every house had been searched, he returned speechless with indignation to the place where the seven soldiers were waiting. He little imagined that his failure would so soon draw down upon him the anger of heaven. From being in a state of bewildered confusion he found himself roped to a poplar in front of the village meeting-house.

The village was in great consternation.

The excitement took on a new aspect when suddenly a group of villagers appeared in the distance. They were dragging along an eleven-year-old boy and shouting 'He knows! He knows!'

'Do you know where they have gone?' asked the *hanchien*, who was humpbacked but possessed an air of real authority.

'I saw them chasing after a woman in red trousers along the East Road. They followed her farther and farther away until they seemed to disappear, and then I saw no more of them.'

The *hanchien* translated all this to the fat sergeant, who thundered out a volley of fire-crackers at him, which in the mouth of the fat sergeant *hanchien* became

'Find me the red trousers at once!'

The entire audience was flabbergasted.

Then someone turned round and looked beyond the row of poplars and made a few sounds; then a few tens of heads all turned towards the south, like so many ears of wheat bending under a gust of wind.

'Here come the red trousers', they cried incoherently.

They saw in the south someone wearing red trousers

running towards them with long strides (Could it be a woman's steps, many of them wondered) It became still more puzzling when they saw that the person running was being followed by a small company of soldiers in grey uniform. And they were approaching the village meeting-place by a short cut through the forest.

'Here come the red trouseis! Here come the red trouseis!'

And without so much as a syllable, the seven warriors of the 'Imperial Army' at once mounted their horses and galloped away to the north, leaving behind them all the cabbages, turnips and eggs, besides three .38 rifles and three horses into the bargain. The *hanchien* also hurried after a horse, and having tried twice in rapid succession and failed (the horse being too small for him) to climb on to the saddle, he took to his heels and ran after the dust of the trampling horsemen.

The humpbacked *hanchien*, however, did not get away. He was overtaken in no time by young Kwan Pei-sui, another of the Kwans of the village.

Soon the red trousers and their followers arrived, but alas! those who had wanted to find the red trousers had taken to their heels.

The man in red trousers was no other than Kwan Hsiao-shuan himself. He had had no time to change into anything else.

'Well, these vegetables and eggs are just what we want to give the guerrillas', Kwan Hsiao-shuan stepped forward to address his fellow-villagers. 'But do you think we can still go on living in this village?'

All were silent.

'Then what should we do? It's quite simple. Let's go into the hills and join the guerrillas, and leave nothing behind.'

'Yes, let's go!' the crowd replied, a crowd which had quickly increased to about five hundred.

Within an hour a long line began to stream slowly into the hills. Intermingled with men on foot there were mules, cows, water-buffaloes and donkeys, all carrying the movable furniture, and the men, women and children were all holding tight parcels, hens, and newly farrowed piglets.

Kwan Hsiao-shuan and his wife walked side by side. From a distance they were unmistakably man and woman, but it was not easy to tell which was which. They had not thought of changing their clothes.

That night, at the guerilla headquarters, a welcome party was arranged for the new volunteers. The commander especially summoned Kwan Hsiao-shuan before the gathering, praised his patriotism and courage, and promised to recommend him for a reward, because he had captured three Japanese and a *hanchien*, had taken three rifles and three horses, and—the commander thought this still more deserving of merit—he had strengthened the unit by leading the whole village to join it. When Kwan Hsiao-shuan heard that he was to be rewarded, he screwed up his courage and stammered: 'I want nothing—just a uniform, sir'.

The commander smiled, for it was just then that he noticed that Kwan Hsiao-shuan was still wearing the red trousers.

A grey uniform was immediately presented to him. When the meeting was over, he ran out and changed into it. Then he shook off what dust there was on the green jacket and red trousers, and carefully folded them into a bundle.

With the bundle under his arm, he walked proudly towards the mud-walled compound where the women were temporarily housed. He sought out his wife, and gently dropped the bundle on her knees. Then, nudging her shoulder with his left elbow, and with a broad smile, he said: 'Keep them for better days to come'.

YAO HSUEH-YIN
THE HALF-BAKED

ERE he goes! Another half-baked!’

cently, among our gueirilla troops there was a curious
mic of people calling one another ‘half-baked’. There
times when we asked our captain for a cigarette, and if
peared reluctant, even when we knew that the cigarettes
oncealed in one of his side-pockets, we would shout in
ice. ‘Eh, captain, you old half-baked!’ Or else, if some-
sneezed with a sound like the explosion of a volcano and
with his dirty sleeves wiped away the two yellow streams
ucus from his nostrils, nipping them between his thumb
forefinger, and then smearing them on the soles of his
by shoes, someone was bound to sneer and shout at
‘Oh, you half-baked!’

Ve were all afflicted with lice, and yet we were not
med by the presence of these creatures. We would try to
them by passing our hands over our threadbare clothes,
if there was much itching, we would pass our hands
lerneath our clothes. It was only when we were sound
ep that we forgot to wage mortal combat on our two
mies—the *kwetze* and the *shihtze*, the foreign devils and
lice. But there were times when we assaulted our enemies
orously. For example, to get rid of the lice, we would make
ge fires, remove our clothing and shake it violently in the
mes. Then the enemy dropped off and fell into the fire
th those puffed-up bellies of theirs which resembled well-
ked sesame seeds. And afterwards, from the fire, there came
continual crackling noise like the incessant rat-a-tat-tat of
achine-gun fire. An indescribable and intolerable smell then
ailed our nostrils, and at the same time we were all over-
me with rapture at our victory. We would dance and jump

about, and slap one another on the shoulders, and all the time we would keep on saying 'Go on, sharpen your teeth, you little nibblers!'

Well, the term 'half-baked' was in such constant use that all of us in time received the honour of being described by the epithet. We never worried about whether it was appropriate to the occasion, nor did we intend any evil to the one who was so honoured. The very sound of the word made us happy, and without it our life in the army would have been as desolate as a winter landscape of colourless mountains.

Though the title was used at every possible moment, the original Half-baked had left us long ago.

The original Half-baked was a peasant and a diverting companion, who was finally taken away from us on a stretcher in a state of complete unconsciousness. We never forgot him. The captain retained the Half-baked's pipe as lovingly as though it were a love-letter from his sweetheart, and he would never let anyone else enjoy the privilege of smoking from it. Before he was wounded, Half-baked had the habit of holding his pipe to his mouth whether there was tobacco in it or not. He would wander round the village, or squat under a small tree with his brows knitted together, looking vaguely across the plain, and always holding the pipe to his mouth, and at long intervals he would gaze at it absent-mindedly. He would then smack his lips together, and sometimes he would pour out of his nostrils two long threads of grey smoke which coiled upward into the sky. Sometimes, one of the guerrillas would notice him at his meditations and say: 'Eh, Half-baked, how's that pasty-faced woman of yours?'

'I miss her', he would answer, blushing a little. 'The Captain hasn't told me yet where she is, nor where is the child.'

Half-baked regarded our Captain as omniscient. Probably Captain refused to tell him the whereabouts of the woman and the child for fear that he would steal away after them. There were times, too, when Half-baked thought of other things beside his family.

'Look at those weeds over there—throttling the field', he would say in a grumbling voice, and then he would sigh and draw in a long and deep breath of smoke. Then, while the clouds of smoke still puffed out of his mouth and nostrils, he would say 'In days of peace, you know, people could live and work without being molested. You wouldn't see weeds over the fields then.'

Afterwards he would brush away with his sleeve the mucus which had settled in the corners of his eyes, he would take a few steps forward and gather up some grains of earth, crushing them between his thumb and forefinger, examining the dark powder carefully. A moment later he would be holding the powder to his nose and placing a small bit on his tongue, nodding gently and murmuring to himself over and over again 'Lovely soil—full of juice!'

During all his career in the army, Half-baked never earned a single patriotic song. Once he did try to sing, but all the rest of the chorus immediately burst out into laughter and jeers. After that, he never attempted to sing, he would just sit there smiling and sucking at his pipe, his bloodshot eyes fixed on our faces as we sung. But he had one song, and only one song, which he would sing at all times, when he was happy and when he was in the deepest distress, a song which he repeated in the most solemn voice imaginable. It was a song of only two lines, which he must have learned as a child.

We left the capital far behind us,
The weather is rotten, the rain and the wind . .

It happened like this. One bitterly cold evening, all the soldiers in the camp were startled to find that a traitor had been captured. The traitor stood there with both hands bound behind his back, trembling on his legs and his face ash-grey. The traitor wore a shabby fur cap, a sickle hung over his back, and from his waistband there protruded a pipe. The traitor was our little friend Half-baked.

The Captain was talking to him, and holding in his hand the sun banner which had been removed from the traitor. The Captain was perfectly calm, but the soldiers were shouting. 'There he is! Dressed just like a peasant—the swine!' And some were saying 'He ought to be shot! That's what he's fit for!'

Unexpectedly someone kicked the peasant in the leg. He reeled, and as though paralysed, fell face downward at the Captain's feet. The guerrillas were disappointed by the apparent helplessness of the prisoner, and someone said 'You see—it's nothing but a heap of duckshit!'

The Captain was still standing there, utterly motionless, searching from under beetle brows, as though he hoped to discover some secret in the heart of the traitor.

'I'm innocent', said the traitor. 'My name is Dumb Wang—everyone knows that!'

'Is that your only name?'

'Yes, sir. He was no scholar, my father, and it was my father who gave it to me. He always said a good name was dangerous, and made you ill-starred.'

'What's your real name? Stand up!'

'I haven't got a real name, your honour', Dumb Wang replied, struggling to his feet and taking a deep breath. 'My father used to say that peasants didn't have to go to school, and didn't have to go to the yamen, and there was no use in having a real name.'

Well, have you got a nickname?’

Yes, sir Half-baked’

The black hairs on the Captain’s left cheek quivered

‘What’s that?’

‘Half-baked’, Dumb Wang answered again ‘That’s the one they gave me’

Our soldiers could no longer contain themselves, and burst out laughing.

The Captain, however, was not at all amused. He kept asking question after question at the poor captive, asking about his home, his native village, the reason why he had become a traitor.

‘I come from Wang Chuang’, Dumb Wang answered. ‘Well, the northern army came and raped our women and killed as many men as they could, and then Little Dog’s mother—that’s my wife—said. “Little Dog’s father,”—that’s me—“there’s nothing left, and those of the villagers who are not killed have gone away, and it’s better to go away, so. The soldiers are no good to us, and it will be better if we go away and have only water to drink and no food.” Well, it was night, and I took Little Dog’s mother and Little Dog, and they haven’t tasted water or rice for two days, and her stomach’s all shrunk, but Little Dog has to eat somehow and she only nibbles at her dried-up breasts, but nothing comes from them, and he keeps on crying . . .’

His head drooped to his chest, and two streams of tears poured down his rough cheeks. Our Captain dropped his voice and said

‘Tell me quickly why you brought the sun banner with you?’

‘I’ll tell you, sir. It was like this. Little Dog’s mother said. “We are living in times of ‘hungry soldiers and wild horses’, and we have to be careful. We don’t mind dying, but

we can't let the baby starve away" That's right, isn't it, sir? The baby hasn't done anything wrong Why should he starve? Little Dog's mother says, pointing to me "You go back to the village and get some turnips, so that we can live a little longer, and perhaps we can save the baby" So I went back one early morning. It was two *li* to the village. There were some northern soldiers in brass helmets, and they fired at me. I had to run back instead of going forward When I got back, Little Dog was crying in his mother's arms . . .'

He began to choke with his sobs

'Don't cry', the Captain said 'Is that why you turned traitor?'

'Only the fools are traitors, curse them If I were a traitor, I would follow the sun to the underground when it sets' Half-baked shrugged his shoulders and went on excitedly. 'They told me that a sun banner would help me out of trouble if I met any northern soldiers again. So Little Dog's mother made the little flag and gave it to me "Take it, and come back quickly", she says. "Damn the flag", says I "It looks like a sticking plaster. What will happen if the southern soldiers see it?" "Don't be afraid", she says, "the southerners are our fellow-countrymen—you've got nothing to worry about!" Now, sir, how can I be a traitor against the Chinese when I myself am a Chinese. Little Dog's mother made it, and told me to take along the damned flag'

He wept, biting his lip and looking up at the Captain with frightened eyes.

The Captain inquired about some other details, and gradually his taut cheeks began to relax. He no longer looked as though he were made of iron. I, myself, was about to explain matters to the Captain: 'This fellow is all right The comrades don't suspect him any more. If we keep on examining him, it will only seem impertinent, and the comrades will

ome impatient' At last the Captain ordered us to unbind
man As soon as he was free, Half-baked snipped off two
reams of thick yellow mucus which were falling from his
se, and proceeded to smear them on his shoes, which already
ntained a large quantity of dried mucus

'Now, listen to me', the Captain continued 'Don't mix
the Japanese with the northeineis This isn't a civil war,
it used to be It's a war now between the Chinese Army
and the Japanese devils Do you understand that, Half-baked?'

'Yes, sir Of course I undeistand I'm not so stupid as all
that'

'Well, then, you can have porridge and soup with us this
evening After supper, you can go back and dig up your
urnips. The enemy was thrown back from this village the
night before last. You can keep the sun banner and show it
to the foreign devils if you see them, but don't let them know
where we are.'

At supper we all tried to be close to Half-baked. He was so
squeezed up between the soldiers that his padded trousers
were almost torn apart. At first he was modest and restrained,
but later on we became so familiar with him that he grew
boldei. He had an enormous appetite, he even licked the
inside of the bowl, and he looked contented, occasionally
nipping away at the mucus from his nose, occasionally
belching, and sometimes he would scratch his teeth gently
with his fingernails, and sometimes he would peel off some-
thing like an onion skin which he threw up in the air so that
it passed over the head of a comrade squatting nearby.

The next day, after lunch, I saw Half-baked again in the
courtyard. The Captain announced that Half-baked had
decided to join up and had been admitted into our brigade.
We were so happy that we began to dance about and sing
guerrilla songs. Half-baked, however, remained unmoved,

neither exhilarated nor depressed, standing there with a blank smile on his face and the small pipe between his teeth.

At night I discovered that my bunk lay next to his, so I asked him

‘What made you join our guerillas?’

‘Why not? You all look good to me’ He paused, drawing in a heavy pipeful of smoke, and continued. ‘Until the devils are driven out, we shan’t be able to plough the land’.

I thought of the sun banner, and asked him, by way of a joke. ‘What’s happened to your little flag now?’

‘I’ve given it to Little Dog for his diapers’, he replied, as though it was a matter of no importance at all

We talked a lot. He wanted to drive the foreign devils away as soon as possible so that he could go back to his fields, and he wanted his wife and baby to catch a refugee train to the interior as soon as possible. Occasionally he would look up at the corner of the walls, where some snails were crawling. I pretended to sleep and watched him carefully as he sat up in his bunk with his pipe sticking out of the corner of his mouth, and sometimes he would look craftily at the lamp and sometimes at me. Once he went out of the room and made water in the corner of the courtyard, coughed, and returned to his bunk; then he knocked out his pipe and lay down to sleep.

‘He’s a crafty fellow all right’, I thought.

In these temporary quarters we always kept the lamp burning at night. But shortly after Half-baked’s arrival the light was put out for two nights in succession, and this created considerable disturbance. On the first night someone had his nose trodden on by someone else who went out to make water; a more serious accident took place the following night, when the sentry’s rifle accidentally went off. We were all startled out of our slumber and half expected a surprise night

ack In the darkness we pushed against each other and opened for our guns, and even with the help of torches we found that we were taking one another's guns, and some of us could not find our bayonets. We were all as mad as tigers. We cursed and did our best to find out who it was who had put out the light. The Captain examined the comrades one after another, but no one would confess. I began to suspect Half-baked. He looked deathly pale, and his knees were trembling. The Captain came up to him, and at that moment hundreds of eyes were concentrated upon Half-baked. 'He'll get a terrific beating!' I told myself. His legs began to tremble still more violently, and he was almost on the point of falling forward. Unexpectedly the Captain smiled and spoke to him in a gentle voice.

'Are you getting used to things here?' he asked.

'That's right!' Half-baked answered. 'Getting used to things. Care for a smoke, Captain?'

We all burst out laughing. Some of us laughed so much that we had to hold our sides and even squat on the ground. The Captain laughed, too, and he sneezed several times. Half-baked was entirely unconscious of the amusement he had created, not a muscle of his face moved; he scratched his head, and thrusting a finger under his collar, managed to get hold of a louse, which he held between his thumb and forefinger before inserting it between his teeth. Then there was a harsh rattling sound as he bit the louse in two.

Next morning we took Half-baked aside and asked him confidentially why he had taken the trouble to put out the light on two successive nights. He blushed and stammered out a few words smilingly.

'The seed oil is getting terribly dear, nowadays! . . .' He scratched his neck again. 'I can't sleep well with a light. Care for a smoke?'

Gradually, he grew accustomed to the hard life among us. He became bolder in his ideas. Sometimes he would ask questions about the guerrillas and sometimes he would even state his own opinions. He knew all about our jargon, calling a road 'a stripe', the river 'a ribbon', the moon 'a stove', and the like. And he commented critically.

'Many ordinary words have an ill omen. You have to avoid words like that. You don't have to be so fastidious when you are just working in the fields, but now that we are playing with guns . . .'

In answer, we told him that we were guerrillas fighting in the cause of a revolutionary idea, we had no need of superstitions. Half-baked never entirely agreed with us, but he would plead with an ironical note. 'I'm only a simple peasant. I don't understand these things.'

Once I told him that the proper way to address the guerrillas was 'comrade'. It wasn't necessary for him to use their real names.

He protested, shaking his head, and saying in a low voice:

'Yes, Elder Brother, but in my village we always use such names as a title of respect.'

'We are revolutionaries', I objected. 'We have new ways now.'

'Yes, yes, new ways . . .', he answered vaguely. 'I don't understand these newfangled ways of yours.'

'Well, let me explain. By "comrade," we mean we are of one heart and one body. Just think. Here we are, living and dying together, fighting a common enemy, and the same fate falls on each of us. Are we not comrades?'

'That's right, Elder Brother', he said. 'There's nothing to fear if we are of one heart and one body.'

On the evening when the attack started, Half-baked gently patted my shoulder, and said in a low voice: 'Comrade'.

then he blushed and laughed like a child. A few minutes later he nudged me, and said 'Comrade' again.

'Are you afraid?' I asked.

'No', he answered. 'Once I fought the bandits.'

We were marching together, and I thought I could hear my heart thumping with fear. I could not prevent myself from laughing.

'You're a liar!' I whispered. 'I can almost hear your heart jumping.'

He was evidently embarrassed, and he kept turning his little pipe round and round between his fingers.

'No, I'm not afraid', he murmured. 'I'm not a coward. Once we went out to attack the bandits, and at the beginning I could hear my heart thumping, and my legs were trembling. But after that I began to grow calm. Elder Brother, I am a peasant, and the only people we are afraid of are the government officials.'

We were about three or four *li* from the enemy-occupied village. We had come to a graveyard, and the Captain was looking for two volunteers who would go forward as scouts, half of our detachment to follow the scouts later while the other half was to get behind the village and set an ambush. Unexpectedly Half-baked volunteered as a scout.

'Captain', he said, 'I know all "the stripes" hereabouts. I'd like to be the first one to enter the village.'

The whole detachment was astonished. The Captain had no idea what to do, and meanwhile the black cluster of hairs on his left cheek twitched. He said, in a suspicious tone of voice:

'You know you will be acting as a spy.'

'Yes, sir. I've done it before—against bandits.'

Someone behind the Captain was saying: 'It's no good—don't send him—he'll spoil everything'.

But the Captain turned to me and said: 'All right. You

go with him, and be careful!" And a moment later he was talking to Half-baked, saying "Very good. But I want you to be very careful indeed."

We were out of the graveyard like unchained monkeys. We heard murmurs of disapproval, but we could also hear the Captain saying "Don't worry about him. He's simple-minded, but very scrupulous."

We were a stone's throw from the enemy-occupied village, lying flat on the ground. We listened for the slightest sounds, gazing in every direction under the starlight. The village was as silent as the grave, and Half-baked whispered in my ear "They're all asleep now. You wait here . . ."

He removed his shoes and thrust them in his waistband, then he bent forward and walked on tiptoe towards the village. About twenty minutes passed. There was no sign of Half-baked. Suddenly, outlined beside a waterwheel, I detected a shadow, and heard the sound of something falling. With the trigger cocked and my gun aimed at the black, faltering shadow, I said in a low voice "Who's there?"

"It's only me, comrade", a familiar voice replied "The foreign devils have gone, not a shadow left. . ."

I ran towards him.

"Have you gone through the whole village?" I asked anxiously.

"Every house, every courtyard. . . There's not a shadow left", he repeated.

"Why didn't you give me a signal?"

"I—I—", he nudged me gently and stuttered "O-our c-cow w-w-wants a r-r-r-rope. D-do you think I c-could get one? You know, in the old days, it wasn't any offence to take something."

"If you take anything", I said in a threatening tone, "the Captain will have you shot."

Half-baked gazed despairingly at me, and proceeded to
1 ove the rope he had wound round his waist. I coughed
1 e times and immediately a host of small lamps shone from
2 ides of the village. All our comrades were rushing head-
1 r into the village.

Elder Brother', Half-baked murmured in terrified tones.
'ok, you can see I have dropped the rope.'

On the way back he followed me, as silent and timid as a
ld who has broken a cup and expects his mother's re-
aches. I realized that he was anxious and told him that I
uld not report anything to the Captain. He sighed gently,
I thrust his pipe into my hands. While I was smoking,
aid.

'You know why we should never take things which
ong to the people?'

'Yes. Because we are revolutionaries', he said.

There was a short interval of silence. Half-baked wiped
hand over his running nose and said

'Does it mean that a revolutionary can never better himself?'

'A revolutionary tries to better everyone, not just himself',
tried to explain. 'The revolutionary has to suffer for the
mmon people, but as soon as peace and justice are restored
everyone will benefit. In the end millions of people will live
id work without being molested, and we ourselves shall live
ppily. Our sons and our grandsons and our great-grandsons
ill go everywhere, standing erect.'

After this, he became even more lively and gay, he became
oficient and enthusiastic in his work, and rarely worried
out his wife and child. He began to learn the Chinese
haracters with my help, one character a day. But, unfor-
unately, it happened that when he had learned thirty charac-
ers, he was wounded.

It was a night when the moon shone dimly. There were

about twenty of us, and we were sent out to wreck a railway line which stood three *li* away from an enemy-occupied village. We had no dynamite. We decided to demolish a few sections of the rail with our bare hands, and then attack the enemy troop train by surprise. We set to work with the utmost caution, but it was impossible to prevent the sounds of the rails clinking together from being heard. The clear and sharp sound could be heard far in the distance, and soon there was the answering fire of the enemy sweeping low over our heads. The moon seemed to be frightened as well, and looked dimmer.

‘Lie flat!’

Almost immediately there was a terrific fire from enemy machine-guns all round us. Some of the bullets dropped behind, but there were some which fell in an arc in front of us, and there was a thick smoke of dust. The machine-gunning continued for ten minutes, and then ended abruptly. The rails began to tremble and ring. Evidently the enemy armoured train was approaching . . .

Our detachment commander used to be an engineer on the Tsingtao-Tsinan railway. He was a hard taskmaster, but an able man. He got some explosive bullets together and bound them under the rails, and then ordered us to run as quickly as possible. We hid in a graveyard. Half-baked took out his pipe and lighted it as though nothing was happening, the commander struck him in the buttocks with his gun. Half-baked hid his pipe. Naturally he was offended, and he confided to me. ‘Why the devil should I be afraid—the bullets aren’t aiming at me!’ Then the explosive bullets went off, the armoured train jumped off the rails and there was a lot of white smoke, dust and splinters all around.

‘That’s good!’ everyone suddenly exclaimed, suddenly breaking the silence of the vast plain.

There followed a perfect silence, broken only by the
singing of a solitary voice

‘We left the capital far behind us,
The weather is rotten, the wind and the rain . . .’

We thought it was all over and ran out of the graveyard
towards the railway. Half-baked was running ahead of me
suddenly he fell on his face, and I heard him saying ‘I’m
t!’ I didn’t pay any attention to him and kept on running
before we reached the railway we heard the enemy infantry
moving towards us from the village, so we began to retreat

During the retreat I passed Half-baked lying on the
ground, but he was still firing desperately at the enemy.
I said ‘Are you hurt? Can you still move?’ ‘My poor
leg . . .’, he complained. ‘Don’t worry about me. I’ll kill
some of them before they get me.’ I got hold of him and
drew him over my shoulders and ran on again, sometimes
tumbling and falling, and once we rolled together into a
ditch. What was strange was that the incessant sound of
clattering hooves, the firing and the burden I was carrying
on my back all seemed to have nothing to do with me. I kept
on running, and nothing else concerned me.

When I reached headquarters, I discovered that Half-
baked had received another wound in his back. He was
unconscious then. We managed to bring him back to con-
sciousness with first aid, but the wounds he had received were
found to be very serious, though they were not fatal. We
decided to send him to an emergency hospital in the rear, and
I remember how he lay on a stretcher in a high fever and all
the while he was muttering to himself in a weak voice ‘Hep,
hep . . . Come along, you naughty cow . . . Hep, hep!’

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Lu Hsiun (1881-1935) Regarded as the master by many literary circles in China

Yang Chen-shen (1891-) Published a novel, *Yu Chun*, also short stories and critical essays dealing with Chinese fine arts, particularly painting and calligraphy. Now Professor of Chinese Literature at Lienta

Shi Chê-ts'un Published four collections of short stories. In an autobiographical fragment he speaks of close acquaintance with old Chinese poetry

Shen Ts'ung-wen (1902-) Shen Ts'ung-wen is a descendant from a line of soldiers. Has from the age of twelve led a military and wandering life and has a thorough knowledge of the common people. Now teaching in the Chinese Department of Lienta

Mao Tun (1896-) Shen Yen-ping writes under many pseudonyms, the best known being Mao Tun. Has taken an active part in literature since the literary revolution of 1920

Lao Shê (1898-) Pseudonym of Shu Shê-yu, a native of Peiping. Lecturer at one time at the London School of Oriental Studies. Prolific novelist and short story writer with an overwhelming sense of dialect and humour. His novel *The Rickshaw Boy* recently published in England and America.

Chang T'ien-yi (1907-) Native of Hunan. Educated in Peiping. Has written many collections of novels, stories and fairy tales

Tuan-Mu Hung-liang Writes much about Manchuria. Leader of resistance movement against Japanese. His wife Hsiao Hung, also a talented writer, was killed by Japanese in Hongkong

Pien Chih-lin (1910-). Published two famous collections of poems. In 1938 he travelled to the north-west and lived among the guerrillas. During the last five years has been teaching at Lienta.

Lu Fen (1908-) Lu Fen is a native of Honan. Published several collections of stories.

Yao Hsueh-yin (1909-). Yao Hsueh-yin comes, like Lu Fen, from Honan. Largely self-taught, he began to write in 1935. As with Lu Fen, almost nothing is known of his life or movements.